



100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY, IL: COLLABORATION WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Suburban Cook County utilized the 100-Day Challenge to foster new collaborative relationships with school districts focused on identifying students experiencing homelessness and implementing innovative new state legislation to provide housing to youth and their families.

HOW SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Suburban Cook County found that a significant number of public school students are experiencing homelessness, with 225 unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness served in FY 2018 alone. Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, the Suburban Cook County CoC had already taken steps to support school districts in addressing student homelessness by spearheading an amendment to the state's Education for Homeless Children Act allowing school districts to use transportation funding to provide housing and prevention services for students who are homeless or would become homeless without housing support. Building on this data and its existing efforts, Suburban Cook County established a 100-Day Challenge goal of establishing new partnerships with 3 school districts and helping them implement the recently amended state legislation.

The Suburban Cook County 100-Day Challenge Team worked hard to connect with school districts in high-need areas and to have conversations with teachers, administration, social workers, and McKinney-Vento Liaisons about identifying youth experiencing homelessness and implementing the Education for Homeless Children Act. The Team learned how to navigate the process of aligning with school permissions and schedules to bring the right people from the school district to the table in order to address student homelessness. As a result of this work, Suburban Cook County has engaged more than 10 school districts in conversations about identifying students experiencing homelessness, connecting them to CoC resources, and implementing the Education for Homeless Children Act.

Key Takeaways:

- CoC and school district collaboration can help increase identification of students experiencing homelessness and improve student access to housing and homeless resources.
- Support from key stakeholders within the school district - including teachers, social workers, administrators, and McKinney-Vento Liaisons – can strengthen collaboration efforts.
- Communities should ensure that school districts are aware of CoC resources and how they can help meet the needs of students.
- CoCs can support local and state legislation that improves the ability of school districts to address homelessness.
- CoCs can provide training and support for school districts to improve identification of students experiencing homelessness. This may include increasing staff awareness of youth homelessness and supporting self-identification of homelessness among students.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Collaborate on Policy Change & Implementation to Address Student Homelessness

Collaboration between the Suburban Cook County CoC and school districts was strengthened by the CoC's advocacy for an amendment to the Education for Homeless Children Act to allow school districts to use McKinney-Vento transportation funds to assist with housing and homelessness prevention efforts. The amended legislation has created a funding stream for rapid re-housing, diversion, and prevention assistance and has resulted in increased collaboration between school districts and CoCs in the state to put new housing resources into action. The Suburban Cook County CoC has been at the forefront of implementation, working with various school districts to develop policies and procedures for implementing this legislation and developing a toolkit that can be distributed throughout Illinois to help school districts invest in housing to prevent student homelessness.

2) Outreach and Engage with Key Stakeholders Across School Districts

The Suburban Cook County 100-Day Challenge helped the community develop strong outreach and engagement strategies to bring school districts to the table around preventing and ending student homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team identified key stakeholders to engage in conversations around improving identification of students experiencing homelessness and improving access to housing and services, including teachers, administrators, social workers, and McKinney-Vento Liaisons. The Team also worked to foster interagency collaboration and engage key decisionmakers around implementing the Education for Homeless Children Act, including McKinney-Vento District and Regional Liaisons, the District Superintendent Office, District Transportation and Finance Departments, and local homeless services agency staff. Suburban Cook County has leveraged the success of these initial efforts to develop a process and materials to guide outreach and engagement efforts with future school districts.

3) Increase School District Awareness and Understanding of CoC Resources

Suburban Cook County built strong collaborative partnerships with school districts by helping to build awareness and understanding around what CoC resources are available and how they can help school districts address student homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team found that school districts were eager to learn more about CoC resources, with many schools requesting additional meetings and information on how to collaborate with the CoC and utilize housing and homeless resources for their students. The 100-Day Challenge Team is working to establish a clear point of contact and working relationship with each school district to help schools make referrals for housing and services when they identify students experiencing homelessness. Suburban Cook County is working to provide training and information on CoC resources to more school districts with a focus on strengthening relationships and information sharing with McKinney-Vento Liaisons.

4) Work with School Districts to Improve Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Improved collaboration in Suburban Cook County between the homeless response system and school districts resulted in better identification of youth experiencing homelessness. The 100-Day Challenge Team worked with school districts to train key staff persons on identifying youth experiencing homelessness and to increase opportunities for students to self-identify as homeless. Self-identification of homelessness was strengthened through youth-led efforts to reduce the stigma around homelessness, increase student awareness of their rights under the McKinney-Vento program, and improve access to information on homelessness resources accessible within educational settings. Suburban Cook County has seen continuous increases the number of youth on the active by-name list, demonstrating the success of the community's improved outreach and identification efforts through the 100-Day Challenge.