

Partnership Aims to Better Recognize Students Experiencing Homelessness

A partnership between the Camden City School District (CCSD), Nemours Children's Health System, and Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers has been funded with a \$390,372 grant across two years from the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education to better identify, understand, and serve students who experience homelessness. The grant will fund research that uses information from different sources to recognize the scope of homelessness in the district and what students and their families experience.

In the 2016-17 school year public school districts identified 1.36 million students experiencing homelessness across the United States, and about 350 were attending Camden schools. "We have identified only some of the students who experience homelessness. The official counts are not representative of the actual number of families in need," said Sandra Cintron, liaison for displaced students at the Camden City School District and co-principal investigator on the grant. "We work every day to make sure that all children can access a quality education, even when homelessness is a perceived barrier. Many families do not know that we can offer them help and support when they are experiencing homelessness. We need to be aware of their situation in order to help. This project will assist us in how to reach even more students and families to support their education."

The project will use information from school records as well as other sources, like healthcare records, early childhood education programs, and housing data. The records will help the district know how many students they are reaching when homelessness occurs, and what sorts of supports are most needed to address educational, health, and mental health challenges.

"Many students and families who experience homelessness go on to show resilience," said J. J. Cutuli, a senior research scientist at Nemours Children's Health System and the principal investigator on the grant. "Resilience happens because families, schools, healthcare providers, and social services keep children on-track, even when adversity threatens development."

Student information is linked to other sources by the Camden ARISE (Administrative Records Integration for Service Excellence) integrated data system operated by the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers. Camden ARISE connects information from different sources to help better understand recurring public problems and how to respond. "We know that student homelessness is a complex problem requiring innovative, data-driven approaches to better understand and address. The Camden ARISE integrated data system provides a unique opportunity to bring into focus a more-detailed picture of how families experience housing instability and opportunities for holistic, cross-sector approaches that support education, health, and wellbeing," said Aaron Truchil, the Director of Analytics and Informatics at the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and a co-Investigator on the grant.

In addition to the research findings, the project will formalize and deepen partnerships between CCSD, Nemours, and the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers to better bridge rigorous research and district policies and practice. The partnership aims to build capacity in the CCSD to better identify and serve students experiencing homelessness. The two-year project is entirely funded by the grant.

For further information: Nemours Public Relations: Karen Bengston karen.bengston@nemours.org Phone: 302-293-4928; Camden City School District: Sheena Yera Phone: 856-966-2000 ext. 65811; Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers: Mavis Asiedu-Frimpong masiedu-frimpong@camdenhealth.org Phone: (856) 365-9510 ext. 3018

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