



Hope for students without homes


 August 02, 2010 by [indystar](#) | Staff

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The push is on to get kids into school on time as educators, particularly in low-income districts, battle the perennial problem of August stay-at-homes.

They also face a larger problem: Children without a home in which to stay.

New figures from the advocacy group First Focus show homelessness among Indiana public school pupils having risen an appalling 26 percent over the two years ending in 2008-09. The nation as a whole saw an increase of 41 percent as the recession continued to batter families on the low rungs of the economic ladder.

Obviously, the impediments to school attendance and performance associated with poverty — hunger, stressed single parents, few books at home, ever-changing addresses and so forth — are exacerbated by the lack of any real address at all.

“Mobility is a big issue. We try to create as stable a learning environment as we can overall,” says Christina Endres, coordinator for homelessness services for the Indiana Department of Education. “With poverty there’s a lot of instability, and homelessness is a whole new game.”

It is especially new in some parts of the state as homelessness spreads. In districts such as Indianapolis Public Schools, hard experience has led to the formation of partnerships with many agencies, churches and other community entities, which have helped fill the gap in which an estimated 10,000 Indiana children live.

Federal funding also is available, and community partnerships are a requirement for schools that seek the aid. The law also requires staff assigned to homeless students in each charter school and each public school district.

Local connections are essential to serving a portion of the population that has to be found and identified before it can be helped. Family homelessness lacks the visibility of stereotypical life on the streets; and youngsters, especially in adolescence, tend to be loath to disclose that they live in a shelter or a friend’s basement. School social workers, along with grass-roots reinforcements such as the School on Wheels organization and the John H. Boner Community Center, have helped countless homeless children to blend in and keep up.

“We’ve learned over and over again, these kids want to be in school; they want to make their lives better,” Endres says. “They just have some challenges that we need to address. They will graduate just like everyone else.”

If the economy that has made school unfairly hard for them is to regain the strength to serve society as a whole, they had better do no less. The future needs all the hands and minds it can muster.

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