Access to Food for Homeless and Highly Mobile Students

Homelessness is a lack of fixed, regular, and adequate housing often resulting from extreme poverty; economic hardship due to job loss, illness, or a similar reason; or devastation following a natural disaster. According to the Urban Institute, the mean income of families experiencing homelessness is less than half the federal poverty line ($22,113 for a family of 4). As a result, many homeless families cannot afford to provide their children with adequate meals. According to the Better Homes Fund, homeless mothers cite lack of money as the primary reason for their inability to provide three meals a day to their children. Homeless families and youth also often face barriers in accessing food programs due to lack of documents, high mobility, and lack of transportation. In fact, homeless children experience hunger more than twice as often as other children. As such, their most nutritious meal during the day is likely to be the one they receive through the school breakfast or lunch program.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) authorizes the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Act provides funding to local agencies for providing housing specifically for unaccompanied runaway and homeless youth. These funds support street outreach, short-term shelter, and longer-term transitional living and maternity group home programs that serve U.S. youth who run away from home, are asked to leave their homes, or become homeless.

For more information about the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, visit http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/programs/rhy.htm.

In 2008 Louisiana reported the highest number of homeless children – 204,053 (18.7%) – in the United States.

The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act establishes that certain homeless, runaway, and migrant children are categorically eligible for free meal benefits under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Children in foster care also are categorically eligible if their care and placement are the responsibility of the state, whether they are placed by a foster care agency or a court. These students and families do not have to complete an application for free meals. Rather, USDA policies allow for automatic enrollment of these students, which is known as “direct certification,” to ensure they receive meals quickly. More information is available at http://center.serve.org/nche/legis/cn_wic.php or http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/.

Once a child is certified as eligible to receive free school meals, eligibility remains in effect for the duration of the current school year and for up to 30 days after the first operating day of the
subsequent school year or until a new eligibility determination is made in the new school year, whichever comes first.

_Homeless children experience hunger more than twice as often as other children._

Good nutrition is an important contributor to students’ abilities to focus in class and succeed academically. The federal law governing the USDA’s National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs grant homeless, runaway, and migrant students categorical eligibility for free school meals, ensuring them lunch, and breakfast and an afterschool snack if the school operates the program, every school day. However, schools also can play a role in providing students with nutritious food after school and on weekends by connecting families to other federal and state nutrition programs and through community collaborations.

**Did You Know?**

The January 2012 Children’s Defense Fund reported on Children in Louisiana.

**In Louisiana**

A child is abused or neglected every 63 minutes.

A child dies before his/her first birthday every 15 hours.

**Louisiana Ranks**

50th among states in % of babies born at low birth weight.

48th among states in its infant mortality rate.

23rd among states in per pupil expenditures.

**Child Poverty in Louisiana**

% of poor children – 27.3%

% of children living in extreme poverty – 12.3%

Maximum monthly assistance for a family of three - $240

**Parents’ Employment Status in Louisiana, by Income Level, 2010**

- Not employed: 33%
- Part-time or full-year: 4%
- Full-time, year-round: 62%

1,114,759 children live in Louisiana

number of children who receive food stamps – 381,000

number of children in the School Lunch Program – 592,795

number of children in the Summer Food Service Program – 32,138

number of women and children receiving WIC – 150,051

**Early Childhood Development in Louisiana**

% of children under age 6 with both parents in the labor force – 65.9%

% of 3 year olds enrolled in state pre-K, Head Start or special ed programs – 21.9%

% of 4 year olds enrolled in state pre-K, Head
Start or special ed programs – 47.8%

% unable to read at 4th grade level – 77.4%

% unable to read at 8th grade level – 77.8%

Number of children and teens killed by firearms in homicides – 78

Number of children and teens killed by firearms in suicides – 17

Over the past few decades, we have made tremendous progress in some areas of child well-being and reduced some of the most egregious disparities associated with differences in income and wealth, and race and ethnicity. Some aspects of child well-being, such as education and health, continued to show some improvement, despite the worst economic catastrophe since the great Depression.

At the same time, some hard-won gains are slipping away. We are particularly concerned about the severe declines in economic well-being for families and their children caused by the recession. While the economy is slowly improving, change can’t come soon enough for the children whose exposure to economic hardship has deepened or been prolonged. As we know, such conditions can have lasting consequences that reduce the chances of future success.

If we want to ensure that the next generation is prepared to effectively compete in a global economy that is increasingly technology driven and dependent on a well-educated workforce, then we must act.

With the right investments, we can provide all families and children with the opportunity to reach their full potential and, in the process, strengthen our economy and our nation.

Governor Bobby Jindal wants to increase the state sales tax. The sales tax is a regressive tax and increasing it will hurt the middle class and especially the poor. Contact your Louisiana State legislators and urge them to vote no on an increase of the state sales tax.

If you do not know your legislators go to www.legis.la.gov and select contact us.