

Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

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PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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Young Children and Homelessness

- Almost half of all children in homeless shelters are under the age of 6
- More than 150,000 very young children stay in shelters each year, and even more are sharing housing with others due to economic hardship



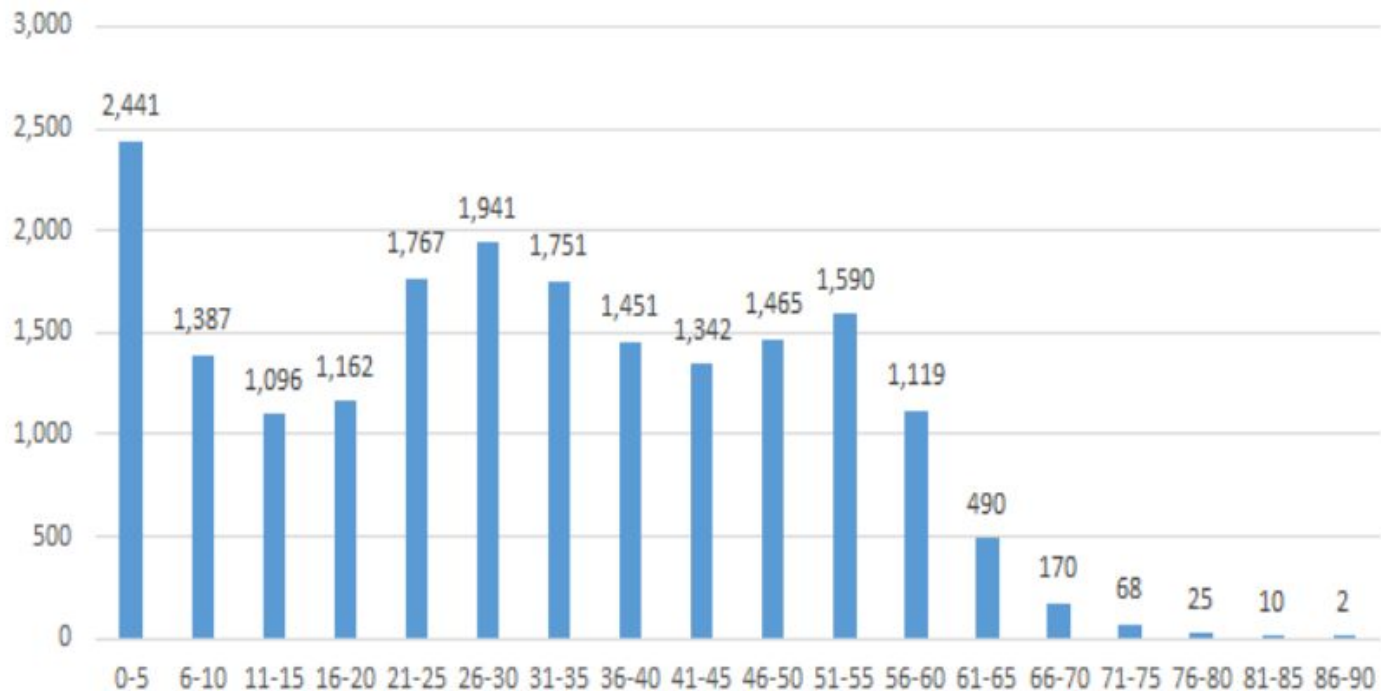
Young Children and Homelessness

- A person in the U.S. is most likely to experience homelessness in the first year of life
- A person is next most likely to experience homelessness at ages 1-5



Young Children and Homelessness in WI

Emergency Shelter Clients by Age

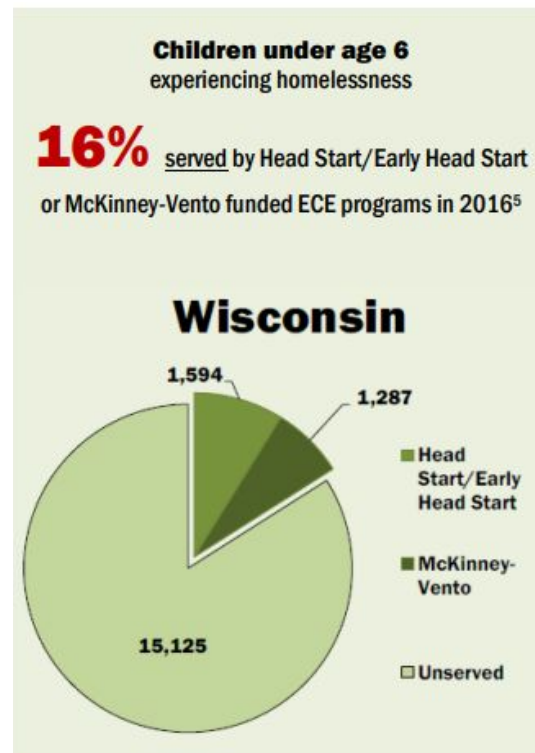


Data from WI HMIS



Young Children and Homelessness in WI

- Total population under age 6:
405,912
- Estimated number experiencing homelessness:
18,006 or 1 in 23 children



Young Children and Homelessness

Homeless Children Are Less Likely to Access Early Education Programs

- Families experiencing homelessness confront more barriers to accessing early childhood education programs than low-income families with stable housing.
- Documented barriers include lack of documentation, mobility, lack of transportation, waiting lists, and lack of awareness and outreach by providers.
- Homeless families who are staying with other people (i.e., not in shelters) face additional barriers. They are often isolated, and not as well connected to school resources and opportunities as families who are staying in homeless shelters.



Young Children and Homelessness

Public Schools and Head Start Programs Have Enrolled More Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Recent Years

- In the 2015-2016 school year, public schools enrolled 43,559 children experiencing homelessness aged 3-5 in preschool programs run by school districts. This is a 9% increase from the previous year.
- In the 2015 program year, Head Start and Early Head Start programs served 52,708 children experiencing homelessness, which represents 4.9% of all children served. This is a 5% increase from the previous year.



Young Children and Homelessness

Homelessness Hurts the Health, Development, and Education of Young Children

- Experiences of homelessness and housing instability in early childhood are associated with delays in children's language, literacy, and social-emotional development.
- Children experiencing homelessness begin Head Start behind their low-income peers in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development.
- The longer a young child experiences homelessness, the more that negative health outcomes are magnified, causing lifelong effects on the child, and in turn, the family and community.
- Homelessness in early childhood is correlated with poor classroom engagement and social skills in early elementary school.



Young Children and Homelessness

Homelessness Hurts the Health, Development, and Education of Young Children

- The achievement gap between children experiencing homelessness and their low-income peers in elementary school tends to persist, and may widen.
- Children that have ever been homeless have an increased risk for suspension, expulsion, and identification for special education.
- However, many children do not conform to these risk trajectories, suggesting that intervening experience may support the resilience of children experiencing homelessness.



McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

Main themes:

- Identification
- School stability
- School enrollment
- Support for academic success
- Child-centered, best interest decision making



Homelessness Defined

The term “homeless” children and youth means:

“Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—”

What exactly is a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence?



Fixed, Regular and Adequate

- Fixed:
 - Stationary, permanent, not subject to change
- Regular:
 - Used on a predictable, routine, consistent basis
 - Consider the relative permanence
- Adequate:
 - Lawfully and reasonably sufficient
 - Sufficient for meeting the physical and psychological needs typically met in a home environment

Can the student go to the **SAME PLACE** (fixed) **EVERY NIGHT** (regular) to sleep in a **SAFE AND SUFFICIENT SPACE** (adequate)?



Educational Rights under McKinney-Vento

- Immediate enrollment
- Transportation
- Free school meals
- Referrals for other services
- School of origin/school of residence



Educational Rights under McKinney-Vento

Language specifically addressing preschool was added to the McKinney-Vento Act beginning October 2015.

- Children in a district administered preschool program have educational rights under McKinney-Vento.
- Children experiencing homelessness can remain in the preschool they attended when last permanently housed, or the preschool in which they were last enrolled (a school of origin).
- This includes the right to receive transportation to preschool (even if preschool transportation is not typically provided).
- The McKinney-Vento Act applies to Head Start programs administered by LEAs.



Best Interest Determination

There is often an overlap or intersection between programs and funding sources

- A child might receive itinerant services through the district at a non-district funded Head Start or a private preschool
- A district might fund 4K but not 3K at a Head Start or preschool location
- It is key to determine what is in the best interest of the child and family when determining where and how these services will continue under McKinney-Vento



Educational Rights under Head Start

September 2016: Head Start Program Performance Standards include requirements to support children experiencing homelessness

- Adopted the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless.
- Children are categorically eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start.
- Head Start must make efforts to maintain the child's enrollment regardless of moving or transition the child to another program, according to the family's needs.
- Head Start programs must allow children experiencing homelessness to attend for up to 90 days (or as long as allowed under state licensing requirements) without immunization records or other required documents.
- The program must utilize community resources, when possible, to provide transportation, if transportation is a barrier to attendance.



Federal Child Care Regulations

September 2016: Child Care and Development Fund final regulations

- Adopted the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless
- Includes requirements for the state to:
 - prioritize homeless children for childcare services,
 - establish grace periods for enrollment,
 - use funds on enrollment/outreach/training, and
 - collect data on children experiencing homelessness



Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B)

- School districts are required to locate, identify and evaluate children with disabilities within their attendance area.
- Child Find Recommendations:
 - An Informed Referral Network is comprised of community partners working together to serve young children and their families.
 - Relationships with community partners have proven to be the most effective practice in identifying children with disabilities.
 - These partnerships provide an opportunity for families to learn about child development screenings and community resources.



Birth to 3/Early Intervention (IDEA Part C)

- IDEA Part C requires:
 - early intervention programs identify, locate and evaluate all eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities, including children experiencing homelessness
 - there must be policies and practices adopted to ensure traditionally underserved groups are meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation, including children experiencing homelessness
 - [Birth to Three Program, WECCP Child Find](#)



UW- Madison & Madison Metropolitan School District Research

- Comprehensive evaluation of the MMSD 4K program to understand the impact on children experiencing homelessness- 4K, K and transition
- Children experiencing homelessness are half as likely to participate in MMSD 4K as their permanently housed peers.
- Children experiencing homelessness in 4K or Kindergarten perform lower than children from low-income households on all measures in Kindergarten.
- In this study, 60% of children identified as “experiencing homelessness” were homeless for 1 year or less, and 25% were homeless for 1-2 years



UW- Madison & Madison Metropolitan School District Research

- The longer a child experienced homelessness, the lower their attendance rate, lower their PALS scores, and higher their behavior infractions.
- Even if a child was homeless for 1 year or less, this impacted their PALS scores.
- Teachers interviewed spoke mostly about providing physical and socio-emotional needs for children. Only a few discussed academic needs.



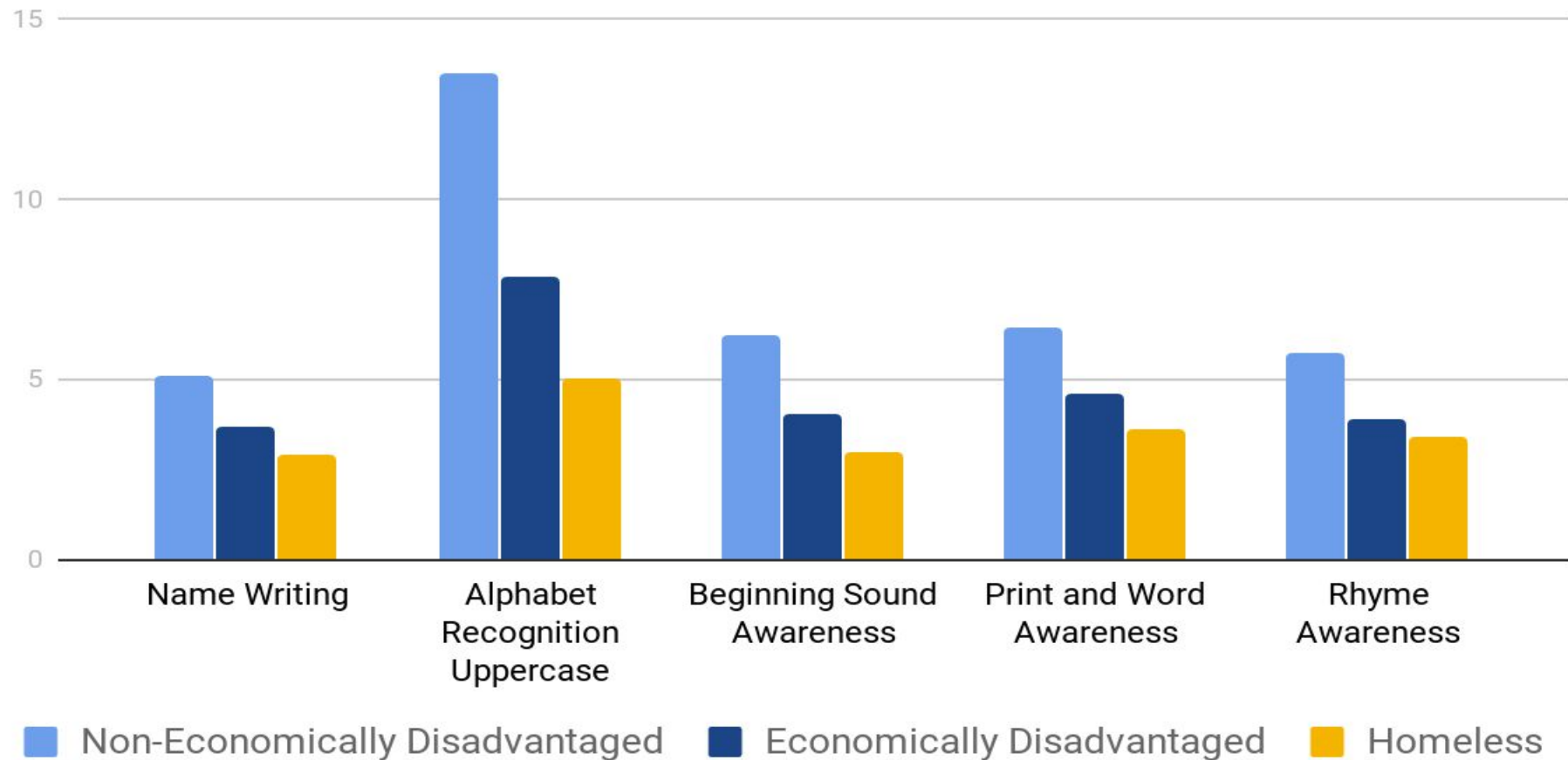
WI Early Childhood Data

Early childhood literacy screening data shows:

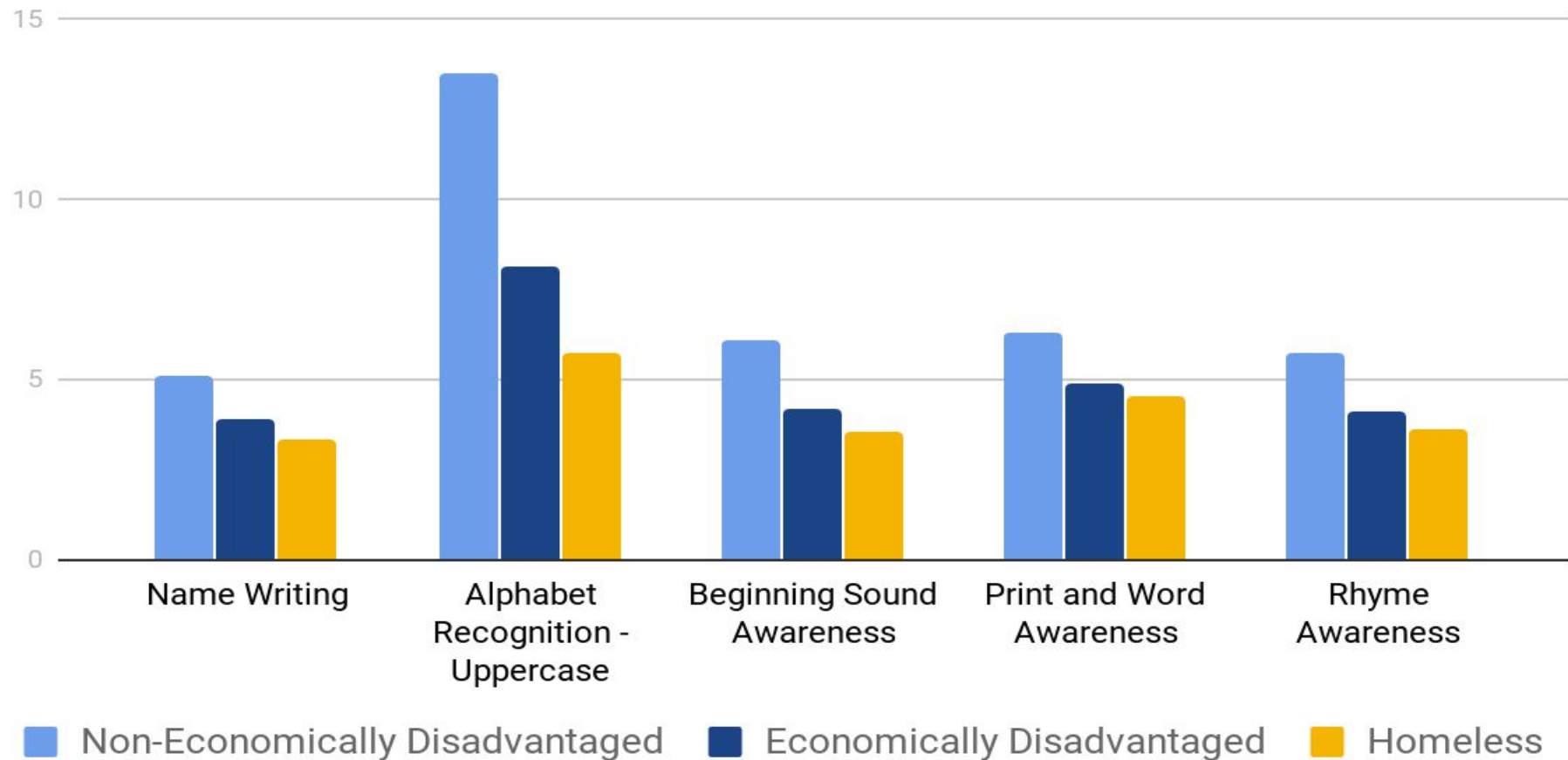
- Significant discrepancies between non-economically disadvantaged students and economically disadvantaged students
- Gaps are even wider for those experiencing homelessness
- Even with the same cohort of students from 4K to KG, gaps are wider between non-economically disadvantaged students and students experiencing homelessness
- Poverty is not just a factor, homelessness compounds the impact on academic achievement



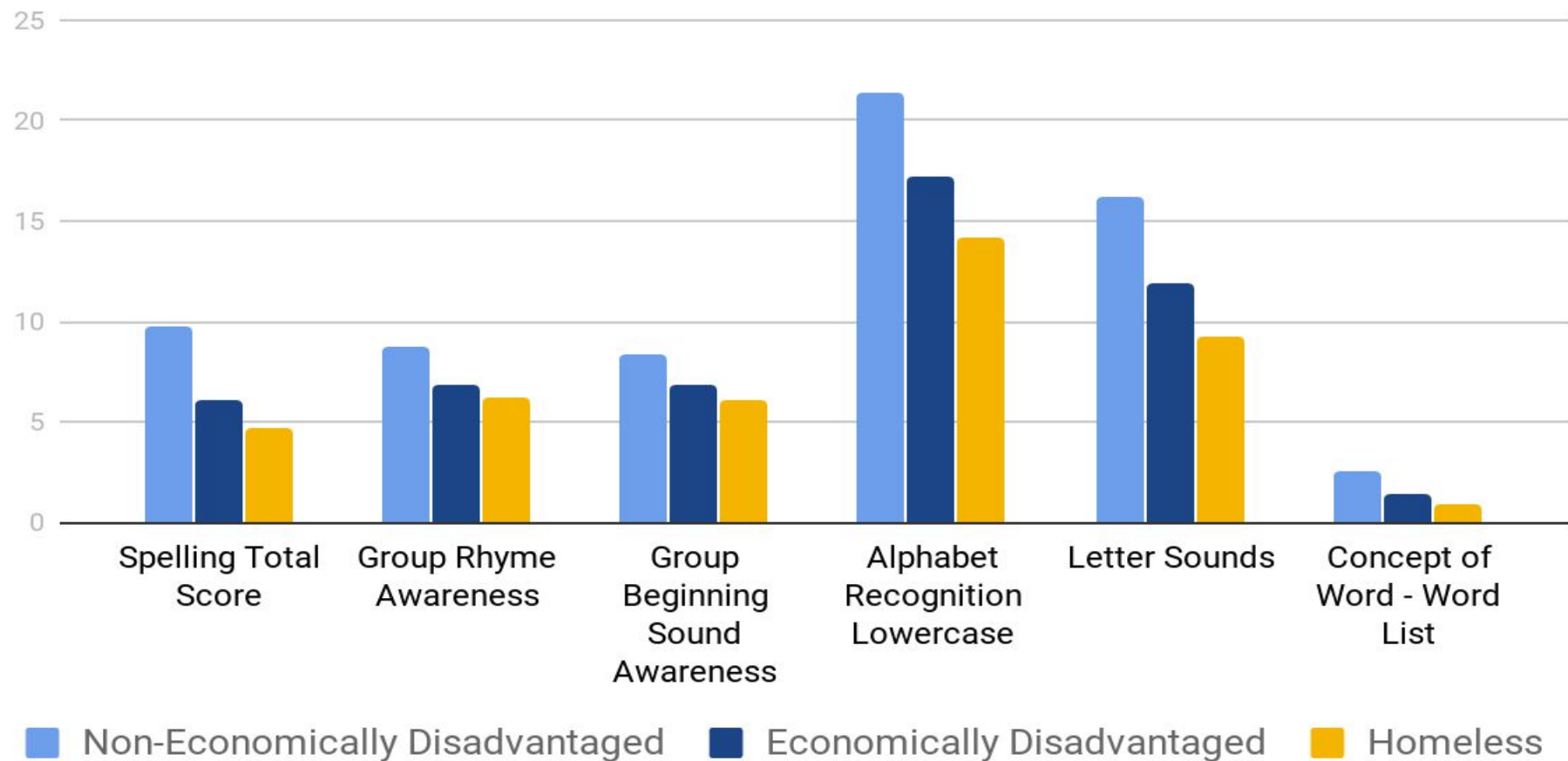
Fall 2018 4K PALS Average Score By Task



Fall 2017 4K PALS Average Score By Task



Fall 2018 KG PALS Average Score By Task



Strategy 1- Collaborating for Success

- It's all about relationships.
- Ask to join existing meetings or set up your own meetings.
- Keep the lines of communication open.



Strategy 2 - Preparing Staff and Systems

- Think of the small things that make a big difference.
- Prepare staff to understand and respond to the needs of families experiencing homelessness.
- Work as a team to meet the needs of children and families.
 - [Informed Referral Network](#)



Strategy 3 - Streamlining Enrollment and Participation

- Cross-train staff and service providers so every program is able to begin the enrollment and/or screening process for other programs, providing a single point of entry for early care and education.
- Make information and applications as accessible as possible.
- Share information appropriately to expedite services.



Strategy 3 - Streamlining Enrollment and Participation (*Continued*)

- Facilitate enrollment:
 - include homelessness in needs assessments and priorities; put McKinney-Vento families at the top of waiting lists; provide enrollment forms on-site at shelters and motels.
- Expedite records by working together:
 - joint release forms; share records within a family.
- Develop joint/streamlined procedures and forms:
 - joint intake forms; provide uninterrupted services as children move.
- Work with families and providers to meet school of origin and comparable transportation requirements appropriately for young children.



Strategy 4- Working with Families

- Quickly and effectively connect families to other services they may need.
- Combine resources to provide holistic services and provide resources to families at their location.
- Build relationships with families together, across programs.
- Understand and accommodate the stressors and trauma parents are experiencing.



Considerations for your work

- What is your LEA or agency already doing to serve young children experiencing homelessness?
- How might this information change or affect the work that you're doing?
- What other resources or programs could you connect with to serve young children experiencing homelessness?
- Who in your district or community might benefit from having this information?



Questions?



Resources

[SchoolHouse Connection Early Childhood Webinars](#)

[National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth \(NAEHCY\) Early Childhood Resources](#)

[SchoolHouse Connection Early Childhood Resources](#)

[National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\) Early Childhood Resources](#)



Books and Other Resources

- [Sesame Street in the Community](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection Sesame Street Links](#)
- [Children's Picture Books \(Homelessness\)](#)
- [Early Childhood Anti-Bias Education Booklists](#)
- [Child Peace Books \(Homelessness\)](#)



Contact Us!

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