AN IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY EVALUATION OF THE MCKINNEY-VENTO
HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT IN THE STATE OF MISSOURI

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

AN IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY EVALUATION OF THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT IN THE STATE OF MISSOURI

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Jessica Masterson
It is hard to fully capture how thankful I am for you, especially throughout this doctorate. I know that I am frequently taken away from spending time with you due to all of the work. However, you just keep on supporting me in all of the things. You are the best wife—God has blessed me richly with you. You are the best momma. Ryleigh, Owen, and Judah are lucky to have you. While you are not receiving the doctorate, know that I believe you deserve an honorary doctorate! When people call me Dr. Masterson, know that is your accomplishment, too. I love you so much, Jessica Lynn.

To my children, Ryleigh, Owen, and Judah
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Abstract

Keywords: Homeless, homelessness, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, tools for implementation, McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Framework, McKinney-Vento implementation fidelity for Missouri

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Homelessness continues to be a growing reality for students within the K-12 public school system. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) was in response to this growing reality, focused on ensuring students and families were better supported by public schools when they experienced homelessness. While research does exist on why MVA is needed, the impact it can have, how districts have failed to appropriately comply, and how states have created additional legislation, there is a gap in research pertaining to the implementation of MVA within the state of Missouri. Additionally, there is no state-specific legislation in addition to MVA. As a result, the researcher desired to explore if MVA was being implemented, as designed, within the state of Missouri. Furthermore, the researcher desired to equip district administrators with a better understanding of implementation and tools to increase their implementation of MVA, better supporting students and their families experiencing homelessness. The findings connected to both research questions explored recognize that compliance may not be the primary concern, but that there are opportunities to better meet the needs of students identified as homeless. As a result, strategies have been recommended to ensure districts are more focused on the needs of their homeless population. There are abundant opportunities to continue this important research, but this research serves as a foundation for exploring homelessness within Missouri. Specifically, there is an opportunity to research if the perceptions and realities align with the perceptions of homeless liaisons.
As well, there is an opportunity to conduct research that involves a larger population of homeless liaisons, plus their supervisors. There is also an opportunity to research and evaluate how the state is implementing, supervising, and evaluating the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act within Missouri.
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION
Introduction to the Background

Around 2.5 million children were facing homelessness, while the number continued to grow (Morgan, 2018). As those 2.5 million children are enrolled in school, schools must increase their knowledge of homelessness while also increasing their ability to support students facing such an experience.

Homelessness creates many barriers for those experiencing it, whether adult or child (Clemens et al., 2018). The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, later renamed and now known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (herein referred to as the McKinney-Vento Act, MVA, the Act), was passed in 1987 to guarantee youth experiencing homelessness have a “full and equal opportunity to succeed” (Clemens et al., 2018, p. 106). Since being signed into law in 1987, MVA has been amended multiple times, as represented in Figure 1. In 1990, the law was amended to protect students from having to change their school of enrollment based upon a change in residency due to homelessness. In 1994, families experiencing homelessness were guaranteed access to other educational services, such as Head Start. Then, No Child Left Behind was passed in 2001, amending MVA to require all public-school districts to have a homeless liaison and also requiring districts to provide bussing, or other transportation, to eligible students. Finally, as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, amendments were made to incorporate a focus on post-secondary education (Duffield & Cohen, 2017).
The Act attempts to ensure the barriers created by homelessness can be negated and overcome for youth in regard to academic access and success. Specifically, the Act was designed to ensure homeless youth do not have to change schools as a result of their unstable housing situation. Without the Act, each time a student moved to a different location, they would be required to enroll in the new school of residence, which is tied to the student’s current physical address. However, MVA requires school districts to immediately enroll any student classified as homeless while also ensuring students currently enrolled in a school can stay enrolled there throughout their time while classified as homeless. MVA is a federal act implemented at the state level. Each school district in every state is expected to confirm homeless youth have access to a free, appropriate public education. MVA aims to remove barriers around residency requirements and enrollment; allows homeless children to be part of a mainstreamed school environment; and allows homeless youth access to education and related services.
necessary to have an opportunity to meet the same academic standards all students are expected to meet (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2015).

An estimated 36,006 public school students experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year in Missouri (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, n.d.). Each public school district in Missouri chooses how to comply with the expectations of the Act. This implementation requires investigation as there are two key contributing factors at play. First, the ambiguity in how MVA defines homelessness allows districts to have a fairly large amount of discretion. For instance, if a single mom is living with her mother and father, most districts would acknowledge her children should be classified as homeless as they are doubled up since they are residing in someone else’s residence. However, if the single mother has no intention of moving out and has been in the same living situation for years, the classification becomes more complex. This is just one example of the complexities of identifying a child as homeless. The second key factor is that the Act is implemented with minimal oversight. This lack of accountability calls into question the authenticity of implementation in all public schools throughout the state of Missouri.

Studies continue to show the number of children facing homelessness is increasing, representing a growing number of school-age children that are or should be identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act (Morgan, 2018). Students who are experiencing homelessness face a significant number of barriers (Tobin & Murphy, 2013), requiring educators to be knowledgeable of these barriers and of how to support students through such an experience. The McKinney-Vento Act was written and implemented originally in 1987, with multiple amendments since, most recently in 2015.
Over this time, research has further examined and explored the detrimental impact of homelessness on youth. Recognizing the Act has been law for over 30 years, combined with growing knowledge of why MVA is necessary, it is essential to further explore if MVA is being implemented as designed, therefore allowing it to provide the targeted impact of providing stability for youth experiencing homelessness.

**Statement of the Problem**

As homelessness continues to grow, so will the number of youths who are identified as homeless within K-12 schools. This growth recognizes educators must become increasingly knowledgeable of the challenges of homelessness, as well as how to help support students in such a position. Students experiencing homelessness may have decreased attendance, lower academic performance, and may require additional attention (Shields & Warke, 2010). These factors may incentivize administrators to avoid classifying a student as homeless, therefore requiring the students to transition to a different school based on the child’s new school of residence. It is necessary to evaluate if the McKinney-Vento Act, as written and implemented, provides the desired support for students experiencing homelessness.

When examining current literature, there appears to be a lack of research conducted surrounding the implementation of McKinney-Vento in Missouri. Recognizing states have the discretion to create their plans for implementation, it is important to specifically evaluate implementation in Missouri. Contributing to concern is that finding information regarding MVA on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website is challenging—this may be representative of a lack of expectations around implementation. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) explored a lack of
compliance with the McKinney Act in Chicago Public Schools, which led to the creation of state law. The Illinois state law contributed to amending the Stewart B. McKinney Act in 2002 as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. The amendment in 2002 also renamed the McKinney Act to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, with the amendment incorporating many of the components from the Illinois law, the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act. The research conducted by Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) focused on compliance in the state of Illinois, which could be of benefit in guiding research in the state of Missouri.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate if the implementation of MVA in Missouri is happening as designed. In 1987, the United States Congress recognized the growing issue of homelessness amongst youth in the United States. To address this issue, Congress acted and passed the Stewart B. McKinney Act. In the 30+ years since the Act, homelessness continues to persist and grow (Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis, 2018; Shields & Warke, 2010). The intent is to evaluate the implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri; such an evaluation will assist in calling for further policy to be designed and implemented at the state level. Understanding the realities of homelessness will allow educators to take a supportive stance rooted in empathy (Clemens et al., 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

While the research questions will guide the findings of this study, the current hypothesis is implementation is a concern. One immediate reason for this hypothesis is prior research conducted (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014; Shields & Warke, 2010; Tanabe & Mobley, 2011) highlights implementation issues in other states. Additionally, based on
current work in the field, the researcher has experienced implementation concerns. This study provides the opportunity for the implementation of MVA to be strengthened. Increased implementation will better support families, partly due to increased knowledge for the homeless liaisons and other necessary staff.

This study will be carried out utilizing mixed methods, allowing for the data to be understood at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data collection to help explain the quantitative results. A pragmatic parallel mixed methods design will be utilized, in which “qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed to answer a single study’s research questions” (Mertens, 2020, p. 322). The quantitative and qualitative data will be collected concurrently, allowing each to help better answer the research questions.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?
2. In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

These two questions guided the research, focusing primarily on implementing the Act. Without appropriate implementation it is unrealistic to conduct a proper evaluation of MVA, calling for an implementation evaluation to be conducted. The following sections explain how such an evaluation was conducted, consistently tying back to those two research questions.
Framing this study was Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation framework. Process evaluation allowed for the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the state of Missouri to be examined. The primary focus, as evident in the research questions, was to evaluate the level of fidelity present for implementing MVA in Missouri.

According to Rossi et al. (2019), “process evaluation is usually directed at one or both of two key questions: (a) whether a program is reaching the appropriate target population and (b) whether its service delivery and support functions are consistent with the program design specifications…” (p. 93). This study will attempt to answer both of those questions. Additionally, process evaluation is typically built on a foundation of program process theory (Bickman, 1987; Rossi et al., 2019). Part of this strong foundation should be specific, targeted outcomes. The Act provides specific expectations around implementation, which tie to the program process theory; however, it was hypothesized that these expectations were not being implemented with fidelity in Missouri. A lack of administrative standards has the potential to impact implementation. These administrative standards should set specific target achievement for the program (Rossi et al., 2019).

Implementation fidelity, as defined by Rossi et al. (2019), is “the extent to which the program adheres to the program theory and design and usually includes such particulars as the amount of service received by the participants and the quality with which those services are delivered” (p. 98). Assessing implementation fidelity was an essential step to complete before conducting an impact evaluation in the future (Rossi et al., 2019; Wholey, 1987). For the purpose of this study, an impact evaluation was not
conducted, but the study can contribute to a future impact evaluation. Furthermore, an individual process evaluation was conducted, as opposed to continuous program monitoring.

The process evaluation framework also includes a component referred to as assessing service utilization. The focus of this component is to evaluate if the resource is getting to those it is intended for—this component was addressed via qualitative interviews with homeless liaisons. In future research, those who receive or should receive services could be participants, but that was not the focus of this study. This framework also describes how to assess organizational functions, such as the delivery system, specification of services, and accessibility. Within this study, evaluating accessibility was accomplished. Accessibility refers to the strategies in place which allow for services to reach the intended population (Rossi et al., 2019).

**Change Logic Model**

A change logic model was utilized within the framework (Helitzer et al., 2010; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Knowlton and Phillips explain a basic logic model may just consist of strategies and results. The focus begins with what is desired to happen as a result of an action(s). For this research, the model was structured by inputs, throughputs, and outcomes as described by Newcomer et al. (2015). Newcomer et al. (2015) explained that “logic models more comprehensively address the increasing requirements for both outcomes measurement and measurement of how the program is being implemented to allow for improvement” (p. 67). The specific logic model that was utilized for this study appears in Figure 2. In the logic model, the input were the students experiencing homelessness, as their presence is what calls for action. The key throughput for the model
was the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as it is designed to support the students, and their families, experiencing homelessness. The primary output, then, was to minimize the impact of homelessness on students. MVA is intended to remove many educational barriers that arise due to a student being homeless. It was important, therefore, to evaluate if MVA was being implemented sufficiently, allowing for the output to be realistically possible.

**Figure 2**

*McKinney-Vento Logic Model*

Helitzer et al. (2010) focused their research on community-based programming; however, the tie to the public policy being evaluated in this research ties well to program evaluation. Helitzer et al. (2010) declared that a logic model helped assess if a process, and its components, had been implemented as planned. McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) also contributed to the research on logic models, noting that once a logic model is created, “critical measurement areas can be identified” (p. 1).

Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation, combined with the change logical model, allowed for an examination of the McKinney-Vento Act and if it was being implemented with fidelity. The change logic model was relevant to this study, as it allowed for an examination of the throughput, which was essential to the intended outcome becoming a
reality. Evaluating this throughput through the process evaluation framework allows for future impact evaluations to be conducted.

**McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Framework**

For the purpose of this study, a framework was created specific to being able to identify a well-implemented McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, at the state level. The purpose of this framework was to identify specific components that should be in place, as a result of the Act. If all of the components are in place, it would be presumed that the Act is being implemented correctly and is having the desired impact, producing the expected outcomes. Each of the five components were constructed from the language and expectations of the current McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. To identify these components, the expectations of the Act were identified and then categorized. The categories emerged from the purpose of the individual expectations present in the Act. Throughout this section, the framework used to identify the components expected to be in place will be explored. The components of the framework are Educational Opportunities, Enrollment, Identification and Needs of Children/Youths, Professional Development for Staff, and Rights.

The first component of the framework for evaluating if MVA is being implemented well within a state is Educational Opportunities. Within this component, four subsections must be in place for this component to be evaluated as in place. The first subsection is that homeless youths must have the opportunities to meet academic standards that other non-homeless peers are expected to meet. The second subsection is that homeless youths must have access to public, free preschool programs, i.e. Head Start. The third subsection requires homeless youths not face barriers to accessing academic
and extracurricular activities. This subsection has to do specifically with the access to activities that may happen outside of the normal school day, such as sports or a club. The fourth and final subsection of this component requires the local education agency (LEA) liaison to ensure parents/guardians of homeless children are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children. Additionally, this subsection requires parents/guardians also be afforded meaningful opportunities to participate in their child’s education.

The second of the five components for evaluating the implementation of MVA at the state level is Enrollment. Six key areas comprise the expectations within enrolling a student who qualifies as homeless. The first area is that LEAs should have policies in place which remove barriers to the identification of homeless youths and also the enrollment and retention of homeless youths. As well, these policies should remove barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, as well as absences. The second expectation within this component is the choice regarding placement of the youth, which shall be made regardless of whether the child lives with the homeless parents or has been temporarily placed elsewhere. The next area is a significant part of this component and, noticeably, the entire act. It requires enrollment never to be delayed for a youth experiencing homelessness as a result of issues with: immunization records; residency requirements; birth certificates, school records, or other documentation; guardianship issues; uniform or dress code requirements. The fourth area within the component is that the enrolling school must immediately contact the last school of attendance to request relevant academic and other records. Within the next area is a requirement for how to handle when a homeless youth completes the final grade level
served at their school of origin. When a homeless youth completes the final grade level at that school, the student must be allowed to attend the receiving school of the feeder school, similar to their peers. The sixth and final look for within this component necessitates a homeless youth be immediately enrolled at the school where enrollment is sought in the event that a dispute arises regarding the child’s eligibility to be classified as homeless. As well, this must be followed if there is a dispute surrounding which school the child can attend.

The third component within this framework centers on the identification and needs of homeless youths. This component has four requirements in regards to the implementation of MVA at the state level. First, each state must have a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths. They are responsible for monitoring LEAs to ensure they are compliant with the Act. The second requirement is LEAs must designate an appropriate staff member who can carry out the duties described in the Act. That individual will be the liaison for the LEA, serving homeless children and youths. The third area of this component requires LEAs to adopt policies and practices which ensure transportation is provided for homeless youths, both to and from the school of origin. The fourth and final area insists state coordinators and LEAs inform stakeholders of the duties of the LEA liaisons, while also publishing annually an updated list of all LEA liaisons within the state on the state educational agency’s website.

The framework also has the fourth component which requires professional development for the staff of the LEA. The first requirement is the LEA liaison ensures school personnel providing services to homeless youths participate in professional development and other support opportunities. The second area requires the LEA to ensure
their liaison receives professional development for their role as a liaison. The final requirement is each state’s Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths provide professional development opportunities to the LEAs throughout the state.

The fifth and final component of the framework, Rights, is the lengthiest. This component has some areas which overlap with other components, as the focus in this area is on the rights of the homeless youth and their parents/guardians, whereas the other components are presented more from the perspective of the state or LEA. This overlap contributes to this component being the longest, with 10 parts, but each of these parts is necessary for evaluating the overall component. The 10 parts that encompass the rights of homeless youths and their parents/guardians are:

1. The LEA liaison must ensure public notice of the educational rights of homeless children is disseminated in locations frequented by parents/guardians of homeless youths.

2. LEAs will continue the child’s education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness, including the remainder of the current academic year.

3. LEAs should presume keeping the child in the school of origin is always in the child’s best interest, except when doing so goes against the request of the child’s parent or guardian.

4. Students who are homeless must be integrated into the mainstream setting, not segregated to a different school or program within a school for homeless youths.
5. If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment, the parent/guardian must be provided with written explanations of all decisions related to school selection or enrollment.

6. If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment, the parents/guardians should be referred to the LEA liaison; the liaison shall carry out the dispute resolution as quickly as possible.

7. The LEA liaison must ensure parents/guardians are fully informed of all transportation services.

8. Each homeless child must be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school, including: transportation services; educational services for which the child is eligible, such as services under Title I, educational programs for children with disabilities or English learners; programs in career and technical education; programs for gifted and talented students; and, school nutrition programs.

9. If the child needs to obtain immunizations, or other required health records, the enrolling school must immediately refer the parent/guardian to the LEA liaison. The LEA liaison will then assist in obtaining necessary immunizations or screenings.

10. Each state will have a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths. They will respond to inquiries from parents/guardians of homeless children to ensure each child or youth subject to an inquiry is receiving the full protections and services provided by the Act.
Design of the Study

This research utilized a pragmatic parallel mixed methods design, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative work (Mertens, 2020). This design was utilized as both qualitative and quantitative data was collected sequentially, with minimal lag time in between (Mertens, 2020). This data was integrated to contribute to the findings, implications, and discussion components of the study. This section will further describe the design of this study, focusing on setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Setting

The setting for the research was all 518 K-8 and K-12 public school districts within the state of Missouri. Access to each district was sought via their identified homeless liaison. Specific districts were highlighted through the qualitative portion of the research. Districts were selected based on liaisons identifying they were willing to participate in an interview on the survey distributed to all liaisons. Districts were categorized using the definitions as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). At the time of research, DESE tracked this classification using the previous metro-centric locale codes, which are: Large City, Mid-size City, Urban Fringe of a Large City, Urban Fringe of a Mid-size City, Large Town, Small Town, Rural (Outside MSA), and Rural (Inside MSA). For the purpose of this research, the eight NCES categories were reduced to four categories: City, Suburb, Town, Rural. When examining the 518 districts, their distribution amongst the four categories were: 12 were City, 73 were Suburb, 58 were Town, 375 were Rural. Three districts were selected from each of these four classifications. Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was
utilized to select specific participants from each of those four groupings, dependent on those that responded to the survey that they were willing to participate in interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated researchers should use purposeful sampling to obtain specific components from their participants, to discover, gain insight, and become better informed during the research process.

**Participants**

For the research, I invited all 518 Missouri public school homeless liaisons and their supervisors to participate. On the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, a list identified the homeless liaison for each district. To invite participants, I sent an email to all liaisons. Within the email I sent to liaisons, I asked them to share the survey with their supervisor. The target was to have a minimum of 100 liaisons complete the survey, with an additional target of at least 50 supervisors completing the survey. It was anticipated there were 518 supervisors, matching the number of liaisons. Those individuals were recruited via email. If all 518 liaisons, along with the 518 supervisors, responded they would all have been included in the data analysis and findings portion specific to the survey. Within the survey, there was a question that asked the participant to identify if they were the liaison or the supervisor of the liaison. Within the survey, they selected if they identified their district as being urban, suburban, or rural. I then conducted interviews with liaisons that indicated such willingness on their survey. They were selected using random sampling (Fink, 2017). To aid in the random selection of those 12 districts, they were first separated into the four separate categories. Then, a random name selector website was utilized to select the three
districts from each of the four categories. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. All participants remained anonymous.

**Data Collection**

To collect data, a mixed methods survey (Appendix A) was emailed to potential participants. Within the survey was the informed consent. Qualtrics was utilized for survey creation, data collection, and descriptive statistics. Within the survey were quantitative questions utilizing a Likert rating scale, as well as open-ended qualitative questions. The questions were written in a way to help evaluate the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the state of Missouri. The survey data allowed for an analysis of how liaisons and their supervisors feel MVA is being implemented in their districts and the state of Missouri. As well, they were able to provide perspective on potential barriers that may be in place if implementation is lacking. The use of a survey increased the number of homeless liaisons and supervisors that will be able to participate in the study.

Additionally, to acquire the qualitative data, interviews were held with 11 total participants. All of the interviews were recorded to create a transcript of the interview. After the interview, each transcript was downloaded for later analysis. I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews via Zoom, using an interview protocol. Semi-structured interviewing is a medium between structured and unstructured interviewing, in which there is a balance of more and less structured questions. The questions, then, are used flexibly, and the central part of the interview is dedicated to topics the researcher anticipates will be explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative interviewing was utilized because, as stated by Seidman (2019), it is a “basic mode of inquiry” (p. 8). The interview protocol (Appendix B) was created to help in assessing the implementation of
the McKinney-Vento Act. I intended to conduct interviews with three liaisons from each of the four categories of city, suburb, town, and rural; however, there were only two participants who agreed to be interviewed from the city category. The other data collection took place using the websites of twelve randomly selected school districts. This collection was guided by the use of an artifact analysis protocol tool (Appendix C). These districts will be selected at random using a random number picker via Google.

Three districts were selected from each of the four categories. The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate if school districts were providing information to families surrounding MVA. This analysis helped to support if school districts were clearly communicating the rights provided to families experiencing homelessness, as provided by MVA.

Data Analysis

Twelve school districts were selected randomly, using a stratified random sample in which districts were first categorized prior to selection, for an analysis of what was present on their websites relevant to MVA/homelessness. An analysis protocol tool (Artifact C) was utilized to guide this work. To also aid in credibility and creating an audit trail, a screenshot was taken of the websites analyzed. The protocol examined what information was accessible on the website, including: the liaison’s name and contact information, an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act, protections/accommodations available to students protected by MVA, resources that can be provided to support families experiencing homelessness. For the 12 districts, there were three from each of the four classifications. A document analysis was also conducted on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, using the same protocol.
used on the 12 districts. The purpose of this analysis was to identify how well the state clarifies what MVA provides for families experiencing homelessness.

Descriptive statistics for quantitative surveys, as described by Fink (2017) and Mertens (2020), were utilized. The focus of these descriptive statistics was on the frequencies and percentages of the data. Fink (2017) explained that descriptive statistics allow for a basic description of both the sample and responses while also allowing for charts to be created that explain what the data communicated. Mertens (2020) captured descriptive statistics as “summarizing data on a single variable” (p. 443). The focus of these descriptive statistics will be to communicate the responses on the Likert scales present in the survey.

For the qualitative components of the research, qualitative coding and qualitative data analysis, as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), were employed. The interviews were recorded, allowing for a transcript of each interview to be created. To analyze the transcripts, excerpts from the interviews were categorized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019). After categorizing excerpts for each interview, emergent themes surfaced and were named. Following the initial coding, the emergent themes were reduced to an appropriate number of consolidated categories. This data then contributed significantly to the findings section of the study.

Researcher Positionality

Within this section, I will expose the reader to my background, allowing them to understand how I am tied to the study and the inherent bias that exists. As of the writing of this research, I am concluding my third year as a building principal, following two years as an assistant principal. Prior to serving as an administrator, I was a classroom
teacher for four and a half years, teaching 4th grade during that time. Throughout my
time as a classroom teacher, I was aware of homelessness by term but lacked
understanding as to the exact definition of homelessness. Furthermore, I lacked
knowledge of the McKinney-Vento Act and the protections included, in addition to why
those protections were necessary. As I transitioned to administration, I quickly became
more aware of MVA, but still initially lacked an understanding of the definition of
homelessness according to MVA. Over my three years as a building administrator,
though, I have become more aware of how homelessness is defined by the MVA and how
important MVA is to families experiencing homelessness. As well, I have worked with
many families experiencing homelessness as a result of my position, many times being
the person who helps connect the family with needed supports.

As I prepare to conduct this research, I have my own beliefs and assumptions at
play. First, I believe that MVA is not being implemented with fidelity in Missouri. The
lack of statewide oversight creates such an opportunity, as there is minimal accountability
for districts in implementing MVA. As a result, there is a need for the Missouri
legislature to develop statewide legislation that further supports MVA. Second, I
recognize the need for the McKinney-Vento Act. I have worked with some families who
have been identified as homeless for multiple years; without MVA, their students would
have to change schools each time they relocated. As well, MVA has helped educators,
especially administrators, to be more aware of homelessness. Finally, in my experience, I
do believe school officials intentionally work to avoid classifying students as homeless,
as also recognized by Shields and Warke (2010). Students experiencing homelessness
regularly are struggling with other issues, such as their mental health (Tobin & Murphy,
As a result, school administrators may be reluctant to have such students be part of their school population. I have witnessed and experienced administrators intentionally avoid classifying a student as homeless, attempting to avoid having that student stay at their school.

**Quality Assurance of Research**

Mertens (2020) described the importance of critically analyzing research. This section will utilize the questions provided by Mertens (2020) as a guide to providing the quality assurance of research. Additionally, the purpose of utilizing mixed methods will be weaved into the section.

To ensure the research is credible, claims were built upon data which supported such claims. Being able to do such is reliant on bias being mitigated. To assist in reducing bias, bracketing was utilized while conducting interviews. Additionally, supporting the credibility of the study was triangulation using multiple sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To accomplish this, the data collected and analyzed from the survey, artifact analysis, and interviews were cross-checked using the emergent themes identified through the coding process. Triangulation also supported the quantitative components of the study, typically referred to as internal validity versus credibility when conducting quantitative research.

Transferability, the parallel to external validity in quantitative research, was addressed by describing in detail the findings that emerged from the qualitative data collected and analyzed. This thick description allows the reader to better understand the context of the findings and, as a result, make their own judgments of how the research connects to their situations and experiences. Additionally, external validity was addressed
by presenting the descriptive statistics of the survey data in an unbiased, transparent manner.

Finally, to ensure participants were involved in the research in an ethical manner, an informed consent was developed and shared with all participants prior to their participation. For the survey, the informed consent was provided at the beginning of the survey, along with the ability to opt-out of the study. To also ensure the research is conducted in an ethical manner, permission to conduct research was sought by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri.

**Significance of the Study**

This research will evaluate if the McKinney-Vento Act is being implemented as designed and expected. The evaluation will provide input to districts on the expectations around implementation, while also providing feedback to the state on strengths and opportunities for improvement. This process evaluation could shape changes in McKinney-Vento implementation at the local level while influencing legislation at the state level. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) previously explored the need for state legislation that is in addition to the federal act. Such legislation supports a higher level of implementation, reinforced by the legal advocacy made possible by the state-specific legislation. If the implementation of MVA is sufficient, future research could focus on if the impact of the Act is being achieved, as also recommended by Hendricks and Barkley (2012). Such research could contribute significantly to the long-term impact of MVA. However, if this research identifies that MVA is not being implemented, as written, in the state of Missouri, the implications and discussion could call for a change in implementation, positively impacting those that are, or should be, eligible for protections
under McKinney-Vento. These implications would have the ability to call for statewide policy creation, comparable to other states which have previously created statewide policies that support, or even go above, the McKinney-Vento Act.

**Summary**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has been federal law for over 30 years, attempting to remove barriers to education for students experiencing homelessness. Some states have passed additional legislation to further address the implantation of MVA, in addition to eliminating additional barriers created by homelessness. However, in Missouri, there is no additional legislation supporting MVA. Recognizing there is no such legislation, and there is question as to the fidelity of implementing MVA, a process evaluation is needed to evaluate implementation. A mixed methods design will be utilized to guide the research. Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation will be applied to frame the research, further supported by a change logic model and a specific framework for evaluating the implementation of MVA as designed. This design and framework will attempt to answer the research questions, focusing on the implementation of MVA in Missouri.
SECTION II: PRACTITIONER CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY
Introduction

This section will explore homelessness and the implementation in the state of Missouri, while also exploring an organization in which practitioners have the opportunity to implement the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The purpose of this section is to explain the practitioner context for the study being proposed. This research will target providing elementary and middle school administrators with actions they can take to support students experiencing homelessness, via the organization Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals (MAESP). This section, Section II, will describe the background of the organization and will also reframe the organization from the frames of Bolman and Deal (2017).

Background of MAESP and Homelessness in Missouri

The next section will dive into the history of MAESP and the implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri. To access elementary and middle school principals, MAESP is being targeted. While the name only includes elementary, the organization identifies they also exist to serve middle school administrators. The following two sections are going to specifically explore the history of MAESP and also the history of MVA in Missouri.

History of MAESP

The Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals was formed in 1979 (Cause IQ, n.d.). The organization exists to “serve the needs of elementary and middle school principals, assistant principals and those educators interested in becoming elementary or middle level principals” (MAESP, n.d.). The organization consists of 11 regional networks that cover the entire state of Missouri, with the entire organization...
overseen by an Executive Director, Administrative Assistant, and Executive Committee. The organization has seven identified committees that help to accomplish the mission and vision of the organization. Each of the 11 regional networks has their own committee members which help to oversee their specific region. MAESP is an affiliate of the national organization, National Association of Elementary School Principals. MAESP continues to grow, currently serving over 1,100 members (MAESP, n.d.). MAESP identifies its purpose to be in understanding the issues elementary and middle school administrators face, while also representing the interests of their members. The organization has a constitution and by-laws which guide its practices and processes. Additionally, MAESP has identified and created their Resolutions and Priority Issues. These will be more deeply explained in the Political Frame section to follow.

**McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in Missouri**

Each state is expected to oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act by all public school districts within their state. The legislation requires that each state have a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths; in Missouri, the title of that role is Homeless State Coordinator. The information regarding the implementation of MVA can be found on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website, which is compliant with MVA. Locating the webpage, though, is not simple. On the homepage of the site, there is no direct link to the homeless page nor is there a link on any of the tabs that are located on the homepage. Instead, to locate the information, one must access the A-Z index or utilize the search function on the site. Information specific to how Missouri is implementing, and overseeing the implementation, of MVA is found in Missouri’s Consolidated State Plan.
The webpage on DESE’s site is called Homeless Children and Youth. The webpage contains the definition of homeless children and youth, providing the grounds for eligibility, for which districts are expected to be compliant. The contact information for the Homeless State Coordinator is also found on the webpage. There are nine links on the page, which appear to target both families and local education agencies (LEA). Some of the links go to other DESE web locations, while the other links go to different, external websites. The nine links on the page are: Disaster Safety and Preparedness; Forms, Presentations and Data; Grant Information; Homeless Dispute Resolution; Legislation and Guidance; Homeless Listserv; National Center for Homeless Education; Safe at Home Program; and, Support for Serving Homeless Children. Two links are particularly useful regarding the implementation of MVA. The first is Legislation and Guidance, as it presents the MVA legislation. The second link of note is Support for Serving Homeless Children, as it has a large number of links and resources which could be of use for LEAs. As well, the site provides data for the number of homeless children and youth in public school, dating back to 1996 but with some missing years. This data assumed accurate classification and reporting by each school district. In 2003-2004, the first year in which the different types of homelessness were categorized, there were 12,592 homeless children and youths; in 2010-2011, the number had increased to 20,046. The most recent data, which is from 2018-2019, identify there were 34,029 homeless children and youths. This data paint a picture of the growing number of children and youth experiencing homelessness, providing the basis for why it is important for school districts to focus on supporting this at-risk population.
Organizational Analysis of MAESP

The section will further explore the organization for elementary and middle school principals, Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals. Throughout this section, the organization will be reframed by three frames explained by Bolman and Deal (2017): Structural, Human Resource, and Political. Each of these frames will help to describe MAESP, providing “a more comprehensive picture of what’s going on and what to do” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 7). The purpose of reframing MAESP from these perspectives is to better understand how the organization is designed and intended to work.

Structural Frame

The structural frame, as explained by Bolman and Deal (2017), is “rooted in traditional rational images but goes much deeper to develop versatile and powerful ways to understand social architecture and its consequences” (p. 43). This section will explore the structure of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals, describing the roles and responsibilities present in the organization, as this frame stresses the necessity for the right people to be in the right roles. While the term structure may evoke the belief it is permanent, the frame also recognizes the structure may change as the organization evolves and the circumstances shift. As a result, the structure of MAESP is specific to the time in history this research is being conducted.

MAESP has two paid employees, according to their constitution and by-laws. The two employees are the Executive Director and their Administrative Assistant. Per MAESP’s constitution, the executive director and administrative assistant are to carry out the functions of the organization. The constitution does allow, though, for additional
personnel to be approved by the Missouri Council of School Administrators (MCSA) so they may carry out the administrative functions of the MCSA. The specific duties of the executive director and administrative assistant are outlined in a documented job description which is maintained by the MAESP office. Another key component of the executive director role is they may serve as a member of any MAESP committee if requested by the President of the organization.

MAESP has four officers which oversee the organization; the officer positions are: President, President-Elect, Vice President, and Immediate Past President. Individuals are elected to these positions, with the president-elect and vice president elected annually. The president-elect ascends to president when the president’s term is up unless they are no longer members within MAESP. These four positions have their roles and responsibilities explained in the constitution. The president is required to attend the annual NAESP Conference and is also responsible for appointing all committees and identifying the duties of each committee member. The president-elect, who ascends to president, is required to: assume all duties of the president when they are not present; play a key role in planning the MAESP Conference; be an active part of the Steering and Finance Committee; attend the NAESP Conference; participate as the chairperson for the nominating/elections committee; participate as the program chairperson for the MAESP Conference; and, any other duties assigned by the president. The vice president is responsible for: taking minutes at all meetings; being an active participant in the Steering and Finance Committee; be the chairperson for the committee which recognizes the outstanding assistant principals at the MAESP Conference; and, any other duties assigned by the president. The past president is the individual who most recently served as the
president of the organization. While their term as president is completed, they do serve for an additional year in this capacity. As the past president, they are responsible for:
serving on the Steering and Finance Committee; being the chairperson for the Membership and Redistricting Committee, when necessary; chairing the committee to recognize exemplary new principals at the MAESP Conference; serving as the NAESP Federal Relations Coordinator for MAESP; partnering with the NAESP State Representative to appoint individuals to the Missouri delegation at the National Leaders Conference; and, assuming other duties assigned by the president.

In addition to the four officers, there is an Executive Committee that assists in running the organization. The four officers are part of the Executive Committee, as is the MAESP Executive Director, or their designee. The Executive Director, or their designee, is a non-voting member of the committee. In addition, the following roles are also part of the Executive Committee: state representative of NAESP; representatives elected by each of the 11 regional networks; representative of retired principals; the current NAESP Zone 8 Director, if from Missouri; any NAESP officer from Missouri. The Executive Committee is, as noted by the MAESP constitution, responsible for all work of MAESP, arranging all programs, scheduling meetings, planning study groups, planning special conferences, and all other work that promotes the welfare of the members and the cause of elementary education. The committee is required to hold three meetings per year.

As referenced earlier, there are 11 regional networks that make up the overall organization. Each of these networks has their own leadership structure, ensuring the regional network is running as outlined by the constitution of MAESP. Each network is also required to create their specific Constitution and By-Laws, submitting them to the
MAESP office every two years. Within each network, they must have the positions of: president; regional representatives, the number of which is dependent on the number of paid members for the network; legislative committee representative; and, public relations representative. The term for their position is two years. The regional networks are expected to hold regular meetings to conduct their business. The members of each region's committee are posted on the MAESP website.

Another key component of the structure of the organization is the existence of committees, which are outlined in the by-laws. Figure 3 outlines each of the committees and the responsibilities they each hold.

The foundation of the structure for MAESP is the Constitution and By-Laws. Within the Constitution are nine articles. The articles found in the constitution are: Name; Purpose; Membership; Officers and Executive Committee; Meetings; Election of Officers and NAESP Representative; Duties of Officers and NAESP Representative; Amending the Constitution and By-Laws; and, Assets, Funds, and Records. Within the By-Laws of MAESP are also nine articles, which are: Quorums; Rules of Order; Dues and Membership; Nominating/Elections Committee and Procedures for Election of Officers; Committees; Affiliations; NAESP Representation; Representative for Zone 8 NAESP; and, Executive Director and Administrative Assistant. The nine articles in the constitution and the nine articles in the by-laws combine to create the rules and requirements of the organization, contributing significantly to the structure of the organization, as it puts people in the right roles and relationships.
**Figure 3**

*MAESP Committees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steering and Finance</td>
<td>Shall review and approve the annual budget, which is submitted by the Executive Director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>Shall meet one time per year to review current resolutions, make recommendations to the Executive Committee for revisions, prepare legislative priorities, and provide guidance on emerging legislative issues. The committee will also work with MAESP lobbyists and the Executive Director on legislative testimony and to communicate with regional network legislative representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership and Redistricting</td>
<td>Shall consider problems of realigning or forming new regional networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>The responsibilities of the Public Relations committee were not outlined in the By-Laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished Principal Selection</td>
<td>Shall be responsible for selecting the Missouri National Distinguished Principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguished Principals Banquet Arrangements</td>
<td>Shall plan and arrange the Distinguished Principals banquet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplary New Principals Recognition</td>
<td>Shall coordinate the recognition ceremony and activities to honor the Exemplary New Principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding Assistant Principals Recognition</td>
<td>Shall coordinate the recognition ceremony and activities to honor the Outstanding Assistant Principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Committees</td>
<td>Additional committees may be appointed, as needed, by the MAESP President</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Resource Frame**

The human resource frame “centers on what organizations and people do to and for one another” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 113). Within this section, MAESP will be explored from the human resource frame, recognizing that the organization exists to meet the needs of elementary and middle school principals, while also advocating on their behalf. The section will explain what the organization does to accomplish such, also explaining how they go about meeting human needs while also meeting the organizational requirements.
Aligning with a focus on people, MAESP has posted on its website its mission, vision, and values. Their mission is to “connect, develop, support and empower elementary and middle school leaders” (MAESP, n.d.). The mission statement clearly ties to the human resource frame, as they identify their mission as serving people, not people serving the organization. The organization identifies their vision as ensuring every school in Missouri has a highly effective and innovative principal, once again aligning with the purpose of existing to serve people. Finally, their values continue to communicate their focus on people, as they center on student success, innovative school leadership, an engaged network of school leaders, and the importance of developing future leaders. The mission, vision, and values of the organization stress the importance of serving the people within the organization. In addition, the organization has identified their Resolutions, which are approved by the Executive Committee and serve as a foundation for its legislative platform. The resolutions cover a multitude of issues and items, but a key focus throughout them is on leaders, teachers, and/or students. These resolutions reinforce the organizational focus on people.

MAESP helps to focus on people within the organization through the use of regional networks. There are 11 regional networks, which allow for individuals from the same area to connect regularly, while also supporting one another. One way they can support one another is through nominating and honoring a Distinguished Principal, Exemplary New Principal, and Outstanding Assistant Principal each year from their region. These regional networks help to create a closer community amongst their members. As well, the regional networks regularly promote membership, trying to help the overall organization increase their active membership each year. Part of the purpose
of the regional networks is to also involve members in the leadership of the organization by utilizing committees at the regional level. Each region has committee members able to serve at both the local level and at the higher organizational level.

Networking is another component of the human resource frame, whether it is formal or informal networking (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The organization promotes networking through a variety of ways. First, they have a membership directory posted online, only available to active members. Within the directory is the contact information for each active member. Second, MAESP involves both retired principals and aspiring principals in the organization. For aspiring principals, the ability to become connected to current leaders contributes to their development. Another significant component of the networking made possible by the organization is the annual MAESP Conference. The conference allows for the members throughout the state to come together to learn and connect. At the conference, members are able to attend keynote speaker sessions and also breakout sessions to learn with one another. In addition, there are banquets held throughout the conference, allowing members to network at those events. The ability for members to serve on committees at both the local and organization level further supports the ability to network throughout the organization.

Finally, the organization is focused on providing professional development to their members through a variety of ways. Bolman and Deal (2017) stressed the importance of these learning opportunities as, “undertrained workers harm organization in many ways: shoddy quality, poor service, higher costs, and costly mistakes” (p. 144). The presence of professional development serves MAESP well, while also benefitting the members and the places of employment for the members. First, and most notably, the
organization holds the annual MAESP Conference with a focus on learning. As well, the organization provides a variety of learning opportunities throughout the year, which they promote on their website. Also, the regional networks provide learning opportunities through their regular meetings.

**Political Frame**

From the perspective of the political frame, “politics is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests. This view puts politics at the heart of decision making” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 179). Any organization is faced with making a high volume of decisions, and MAESP is no different. Furthermore, operating as a non-profit organization contributes to the allocation of scarce resources. This section will explain MAESP from the political frame.

The presence of a constitution and by-laws helps to identify how decisions are to be made and how resources will be allocated. The articles within the constitution and by-laws help to identify the decision-making processes for the organization. The duties of the Executive Director are outlined in the articles, as well as other decision-making roles such as the officers of MAESP. As well, the committees outlined in the constitution and by-laws help to identify how resources are to be allocated. While the Executive Director creates and submits the budget, the Finance and Steering Committee is responsible for approving it, therefore allocating resources for the year.

Another component of the organization, which is political, is the election process for multiple positions within the organization. At the organization level, the four officers are elected to serve their terms. At the regional level, each regional network also holds elections to fill their positions, of which there are a minimum of four. Following
elections, these elected individuals then participate in meetings in which they hold voting power and also have input on decisions. For individuals on the Executive Committee, there are three meetings a year in which this work is front and center. As well, the roles and responsibilities of these elected individuals are outlined in the constitution and by-laws, helping to clarify the delegation of authority. Within this work, alliances will inevitably form as “members have interests in common and believe they can do more together than apart” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 190).

Viewed from the political frame, the committee work that takes place within the organization is also political. One element of the political nature of the committees is the distribution of power. Each committee has a chairperson and all member roles are identified by the president of the organization. These two individuals hold a larger amount of power than the other individual members. However, the collective of the remaining members has power, as they have the ability to form together to heavily influence decisions. Three particular committees are particularly political: Steering and Finance Committee, Legislative Committee, Distinguished Principal Selection Committee. The Steering and Finance Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving the annual budget which is submitted by the MAESP Executive Director. The committee is a significant part of allocating resources in the context of scarcity and competing interests. The Legislative Committee is responsible for reviewing and modifying the resolutions of MAESP while preparing legislative priorities. As well, the committee works with the lobbyists of the organization, who are tasked with helping progress the agenda. Then, the Distinguished Principal Selection Committee is political in that they hold the power to name the Missouri Distinguished Principal, who then goes
to be recognized at the national level. The process of selecting this individual is political in nature as they have to first be nominated by their regional network, then be vetted by the committee before them naming the Missouri Distinguished Principal.

Further contributing to the political nature of MAESP are their lobbying efforts. The organization is aligned with lobbyists who are tasked with helping their agenda have an impact on legislation at the state level. Guiding this work are the Priority Issues and Resolutions identified by the organization. MAESP has outlined on their website what their Priority Issues and Resolutions are, which set the foundation for their legislative work. As well, MAESP has written a long-range plan, which ties to their ongoing legislative influence. Finally, the manner in which MAESP is funded is rooted in politics. The organization works to attract new members through a manner of methods, while also working to keep current members active. Their work on the legislation provides some of the rationale for membership. As well, MAESP forms partnerships with businesses, giving them advertising space in their monthly magazine. In addition, MAESP sells space at their annual conference allowing for businesses to come in and set up booths to try and attract new business.

**Implications and Limitations for Research**

When considering the implications this research could have on MAESP, there are two key areas to consider: administrator practice and legislation. The term administrator is referring specifically to elementary and middle school principals since they are the group represented by MAESP. This section is going to explore how administrator practice, as well as legislation, could be impacted by the research being proposed. This
information is not exhaustive, as there are many potential impacts, but is instead targeted at the most likely implications for research.

One potential implication for this research is equipping administrators with a better understanding of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This research will be exploring the implementation of MVA throughout Missouri; the findings will help administrators to evaluate their implementation and, as an extension, their understanding of the Act. This understanding could include better knowing the definitions of homelessness and the expectations for supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Another likely implication is providing administrators with a checklist for how to best implement MVA. This checklist will connect to the framework for evaluating if MVA is being implemented at a high level. As well, the research will be categorized based on urban, suburban, and rural school districts. This research could provide districts with meaningful information on how to best implement MVA, while evaluating their own compliance with the Act. The checklist has the ability to serve as a resource which then ties to the best practices for supporting students and families experiencing homelessness.

A final implication which is likely for MAESP to consider is if the issue of supporting students experiencing homelessness should be added to their Priority Issues document. Adding homelessness to their list could strengthen the implementation of MVA in Missouri, while also providing the potential basis for legislative action around any identified concerns in regards to implementing MVA. This legislative action could call for the need for state-specific legislation or could bring attention to the need for state action on the growing number of students identified as homeless.
A limitation of this research will be the target audience. While building principals have been identified as the audience, this audience may not have the full ability to improve the implementation of MVA within their district. Realistically, this research would also target school board members, superintendents, and other district leadership, in addition to building principals. To access this audience, I would need to present to the members of the Missouri Council of School Administrators (MCSA). MCSA, however, does not hold an annual conference, limiting the ability to target them.

Summary

Homelessness continues to be a growing reality for many students and families in Missouri. This experience calls for attention and action by both school districts and the state of Missouri. To create attention and action, this research will target MAESP as an audience, as their members are elementary and middle school principals who have the ability to strengthen the implementation of MVA. In addition, MAESP has the ability to lobby for state action, using their network of influential voices and lobbyists. This research has the legitimate ability to better equip school administrators with the tools to ensure they are best supporting their students experiencing homelessness.
SECTION III: SCHOLARLY CONTEXT
Introduction

Homelessness has continued to rise rapidly in the United States throughout the 21st century. Miller (2009) cited the number of school-age children experiencing homelessness to be between 900,000 and 1.4 million, while Morgan (2018) stated around 2.5 million children experience homelessness. The discrepancy between these two estimates may be attributed to the first reference only including school-age children, while the other includes all children—additionally, some of the discrepancy may be connected to the continued rise of homelessness between the date in which the data were collected. Pavlakis (2018) presented statistics which showed homelessness experienced an 18% increase in U.S. public schools from 2010-2011 to 2012-2013. Even more drastic is that school-age children represent almost 40 percent of the entire homeless population in the United States (Canfield et al., 2017). The statistics around the rising rates of homelessness are alarming, as there are multiple barriers one faces as a result of experiencing homelessness (Clemens et al., 2018). You may be asking, what exactly is homelessness? There are a variety of definitions of homelessness, some providing more detail than others—Losinski et al. (2013) provided a solid, brief definition that succinctly identified the core meaning of homelessness by stating those “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” are homeless (p. 92). While there are additional complexities to what is defined as homelessness, this definition provides a clear look at the instability individuals who are homeless face.

In 1987, in response to growing knowledge around the impact of homelessness and the ongoing rise of homeless students, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was passed. The purpose of the act was primarily to ensure that homeless
youth have a “full and equal opportunity to succeed” (Clemens et al., 2018, p. 106). This original act has been amended multiple times (Losinski et al., 2013) and was also renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (herein referred to as the McKinney-Vento Act, MVA, the Act). As written in the reauthorized policy in 2002, MVA requires that each state ensure homeless youth have access to a free, appropriate public education, including public preschool; remove barriers around residency requirements and enrollment; allow homeless children to be part of a mainstreamed school environment; and, allow homeless youth access to education and related services necessary to have an opportunity to meet the same academic standards all student are expected to meet (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2015). As explained by Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014), the Act also defined homelessness as “those living in shelters, sharing housing with other families or individuals (‘doubled up’); living in cars, abandoned buildings, on the streets or other inadequate situations; or living in trailer parks or camping grounds due to lack of adequate living accommodations” (p. 151).

This literature review will explore the realities of homelessness, connecting with homeless families, and the need for federal, state, and local action. Additionally, this literature review will explore the process evaluation framework and change logic models. As stated by Clemens et al. (2018), “public educational environments may serve as the central point for providing resources and support for youth and families experiencing homelessness” (p. 105). Recognizing there is little literature about how school principals can better meet the needs of their homeless families (Shields & Warke, 2010), this review will attempt to illuminate the need for future research.
The Reality of Homelessness

Losinski et al. (2013) defined homelessness as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (p. 92). There are, however, differing beliefs as to what is the appropriate definition of homelessness. Pavlakis (2018) provided a more in-depth definition, leaning upon language from the McKinney-Vento Act, defining homelessness as “including students not only living in public spaces, shelters, and motels or hotels but also those doubling up (sharing housing out of economic necessity) and awaiting foster care placement” (p. 1045). Youth who are doubling up, meaning their family is staying at the home of a friend or relative, represent over 50% of the youth homeless population according to Morgan (2018). In an effort to simplify the complexities of defining homelessness, Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) called for the term residential instability to be used in place of homeless. The variety of definitions utilized helps to represent both the complexity of homelessness, as well as the ongoing discussion about what exactly is homelessness. In this brief start so far, four definitions have already been provided, a small representation of the large variety of definitions seen in the literature regarding homelessness.

The complexities of homelessness do not end with trying to define what homelessness is—it persists when trying to examine the impact of homelessness on youth. Morgan (2018) wrote it was expected around 1 million of the 1.3 million students classified as homeless would fail to complete high school. This expectation alone is staggering, before considering all of the other impacts of homelessness. As well, families with children now account for 34% of the homeless population, with this percentage continuing to rise (Morgan, 2018; Shields & Warke, 2010). This is a frightening increase
considering that during the 1980s, families with children represented less than 1% of the homeless population (Losinski et al., 2013). The combination of these two components creates alarm when considering how many additional youths may not complete high school in the coming years unless this trend is reversed (Miller, 2009). Howland et al. (2017) explained that those who were homeless had significantly poorer scores on the WISC-R Vocabulary than their counterparts who were also under-resourced, but had stable housing. In addition to the decreasing likelihood of academic success homeless youth regularly experience, there is an additional long list of negative impacts due to experiencing homelessness. Miller (2009), Tobin and Murphy (2013), and Morgan (2018) each discussed the food insecurity and malnutrition experienced by many homeless youths. Tobin and Murphy (2013) and Morgan (2018) also explained that having access to clean clothes and personal hygiene items/care is a concern for the homeless youth population. Additionally, the homeless population struggles to access the health services they need, while also experiencing a higher level of health issues, including mental health challenges (Losinski et al., 2013; Miller, 2009; Morgan, 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013;). Miller (2009) examined such mental health challenges, explaining that youth experiencing homelessness are much more likely to experience “physical, physiological, and substance abuse” (p. 223). Furthermore, such mental health challenges further contribute to ongoing instability for youth as they age. Recognizing the accumulation of the many issues experienced because of homelessness, Tobin and Murphy (2013) also noted that attendance is commonly an issue for homeless students. Such attendance issues could be the result of a variety of factors, such as social isolation, transportation challenges, or increased health issues. The combination of these many
challenges culminates in having a negative impact on academic performance (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Morgan, 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

Recognizing the high number of youths who are experiencing homelessness, it is essential the education staff working with these students better understand the signs of homelessness so the school can begin to support the family and offer necessary resources. This work should be coordinated through the homeless liaison at the school (Clemens et al., 2018) and would assist in removing some of the barriers which are created by the school community for homeless families. Many times, homeless families struggle to appropriately and fairly access education due to shortcomings of the schools they are working with during the enrollment process and while actively enrolled (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Shields & Warke, 2010). In addition to struggling to access the typical education that is to be available to all students, “homeless students often are not allowed to participate in certain school activities because they either cannot pay the required fees, or they are unable to participate in after-school activities because of unique transportation arrangements” (Tanabe & Mobley, 2011, p. 55). As this section has explored, children experiencing homelessness face a significant number of barriers they must try to overcome to regain stability. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) alluded to this reality, stating “many of these problems, such as obtaining food, shelter, and medical attention, are more pressing than others and therefore readily take precedence over other important, but less imminent, concerns” (p. 51). This depicts the reality regarding barriers homelessness creates, forcing those experiencing it to prioritize needs that many others have present at all times.
Identifying Homeless Students and Families

With the recognition of the many barriers present for homeless families, it is crucial school staff be capable of identifying students who are experiencing homelessness, creating an ability to connect families to resources for which they are eligible (Clemens et al., 2018). Exacerbating this issue, though, is that many homeless youths do not share the struggles they are enduring (Morgan, 2018), which reinforces the need for school staff to have an understanding and acceptance of students experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, Morgan (2018) acknowledged the McKinney-Vento Act “fails to provide a considerable number of homeless youth with the services they need” (p. 218) requiring school staff to assist in this area of need. Crane and Livock (2012) stressed that staff must be committed to pursuing individual outcomes over the mindset of ‘what we have always done’, as it allows for staff to ensure supports are appropriate for that specific student/family. Such a focus would allow staff, and schools, to be able to better support families during times of homelessness.

A study conducted by Pavlakis (2018) found that parents of students experiencing homelessness wanted their children to be involved at school and that the parents valued education. It is important staff reciprocate this desire regarding students experiencing homelessness by creating a welcoming environment for these families. Shields and Warke (2010) concluded that failing to create such an environment made it impossible to support the families appropriately. Swick and Bailey (2004) recognized that “through staff development efforts…and promoting a family friendly school culture, the venue for reaching homeless families is strengthened” (p. 211). The literature also asserts staff must ensure positive communication is occurring between the school and family, as this is a
commonly missing component (Losinski et al., 2013; Swick & Bailey, 2004). School staff must, then, create strong and positive lines of communication with the families experiencing homelessness so the family and student will feel part of the school community. Tobin and Murphy (2013) communicated such, stating “efforts need to be made to ensure that homeless youngsters become members of the school community, thus replacing social isolation with social connections and support” (p. 16). Ensuring the youth experiencing homelessness does not identify as an outsider or outcast is essential to connecting with the student and making them feel of importance, hopefully overcoming the barriers they are facing (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006).

Education staff must be aware of the law surrounding students experiencing homelessness, allowing for staff to at minimum provide the expectations written into McKinney-Vento. As referenced earlier, the McKinney-Vento Act stipulates school practices and policies surrounding enrollment cannot impede the enrollment of a student experiencing homelessness. Whether or not the student has the appropriate documentation for school enrollment, such as their birth certificate, immunization records, and proof of residency, the child must be enrolled immediately (Losinski et al., 2013). However, as noted by a building principal in a study conducted by Shields and Warke (2010), many buildings fail to comply correctly with this law. These school-created barriers can result in families falling “into a pattern of victimization and depression that can leave them feeling vulnerable, alone, and incapable of navigating the often elaborate bureaucratic regulations that can be a part of receiving services” (Losinski et al., 2013, p. 95). While there are bureaucratic regulations tied to MVA, it is essential staff know these regulations and help families navigate the regulations versus allowing
the regulations to stifle families’ abilities to access resources designed for their situation. In addition, as covered in an earlier section, schools should be dedicated to helping fill the gap of basic needs, such as food, clothing, needed supplies, hygiene items, and health services (Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

**Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness**

Building off of the previous section, public schools must be intentional with their work in supporting students and families who are experiencing homelessness. Throughout this section, the best practices for supporting students and their families facing homelessness will be explored. The previous section focused on the importance of identifying homeless students and families, while this section will focus on how to support students experiencing homelessness. Being explored will be the importance of educational staff understanding the realities of homeless, interventions and academics, and how to partner with families and make them part of the conversation in supporting their child(ren).

Duffield (2001) acknowledged that one significant challenge which is impacting the work needed to supporting students experiencing homelessness is a “lack of awareness about homelessness among school personnel and communities” (p. 332). Sulkowski (2016) addressed this reality, communicating that a first step in supporting students experiencing homelessness must center on increasing the awareness of what homeless students are actually facing. To help educators be better able to serve homeless students, Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) called for ensuring staff understand the dynamics of being homeless. One dynamic that has been misunderstood is that being doubled-up, in which a family is now living at someone else’s residence, is better and has
less of an impact on the individuals. However, Pavlakis (2018) explained that being doubled-up did not have less of an impact in the parent interviews conducted. Additionally, educators must engage in reflecting on their own negative beliefs of why they believe individuals are homeless, as their beliefs may be incorrect and contribute negatively to supporting students experiencing homelessness (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2011). These beliefs help to negatively contribute to the stigma of homelessness, a stigma that negatively impacts homeless students (Sulkowski, 2016). There is a need, as a result, for professional development which helps to “educate and sensitize school staff, other families and students, and community agency workers to the needs and rights of homeless children and families” (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006, p. 42). Masten et al. (2015) also called for professional development for educators, focused on the rights of students and also how to promote resilience among students experiencing homelessness.

Students experiencing homelessness need to have educators who are focused on providing them interventions and focused on their academic success, in addition to meeting their basic needs. Sulkowski (2016) communicated that having a caring educator who conveys their concern for the student’s well-being will help to reduce feelings of isolation, abandonment, and hopelessness. Reducing those feelings then contributes to the student being able to navigate school, while being supported in the areas of learning and functional skills. In addition to the importance of having a caring adult, it is imperative educators assist in connecting students and families experiencing homelessness to services, such as public preschool programs (Duffield, 2001). The ability to be connected to early interventions will help to mitigate achievement gaps that arise later on (Masten et
Furthermore, it is important that educators participate in “outreach to ensure these students participate in routine assessments, prekindergarten screening, and other opportunities for early identification of learning problems and needs” (Masten et al., 2015, p. 324). Participation in these screenings and assessments will assist in making sure students facing homelessness receive necessary interventions and are connected to services they are eligible for in a timely manner. Canfield (2014) recognized the complexities of strategies educators need to know, calling for professional development specific to equipping educators with the skills to collaborate with other providers so they may “improve overall outcomes and reduce broader, non-school specific barriers” (p. 172).

Supporting students experiencing homelessness must include partnering with their families, or the support system they have in place. Swick and Bailey (2004) acknowledged that very often educators do not boost dialogue with the families experiencing homelessness. If educators are to proactively meet the basic needs of these families, as called for by Tobin and Murphy (2013), this ongoing dialogue must be present. Swick and Bailey (2004) also provided five strategies for promoting dialogue with families experiencing homelessness: interagency links; school and district initiatives; teacher and staff observations and initiatives; parent and family requests; and, community initiatives. As well, conducting a meeting with the family in which the educator gathers the needs of the family, while also assessing their strengths and what resources they already have in place helps to foster a partnership with the family (Swick & Bailey, 2004). Another activity that can build trust with the family is to have them create a self-portrait which will “show their strengths, needs, and potential long-term
success” (Swick & Bailey, 2004, p. 212). Crane and Livock (2012) recommended the good practice of explicitly involving the families in identifying needed supports. Taylor Wilkins et al. (2015) also discussed the potential benefit of having homeless liaisons, a position required by MVA, take on an increased role of having contact with families experiencing homelessness.

**Federal, State, and Local Action**

“As a result of increasing levels of economic volatility and family poverty, school-age children account for nearly 40 percent of the total population of homeless people in the United States” (Canfield et al., 2017, p. 53). This 40 percent equates to around 900,000 to 1.4 million school-age children experiencing homelessness at any given time, according to Miller (2009). Such staggering statistics lay the groundwork for why such an issue calls for attention from the federal, state, and local levels. The federal response to the issue since 1987 is the McKinney-Vento Act. However, this federal act has many barriers when it comes to the implementation at the state and local level (Clemens et al., 2018; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Losinski et al. (2013) recognized such barriers and called for strategies to be implemented, which “emphasize the need for interagency collaboration and the development of policies and procedures to eliminate red tape and to enhance efforts to collect data in a meaningful and accurate manner” (p. 95). This section will navigate the need, and presence, of action at the federal, state, and local levels.

**Federal Action**

The research on the need and presence of federal action is tied primarily to the McKinney-Vento Act, which initially began as the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless
Assistance Act in 1987. That Act was the first federal legislation specific to youth experiencing homelessness. This initial Act had two foundational focuses, which have continued to drive ongoing legislation: 1) access to school even if lacking enrollment requirements and, 2) the option for students to stay enrolled in their school of history versus transitioning to their new school of residence (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). Since that initial passage, the Act has been amended and reauthorized multiple times, while also being renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. While the initial Act provided a solid foundation for the rights of students experiencing homelessness, it lacked specificity and made implementation a challenge, which provided a need for future amendments; the 2001 reauthorization specifically targeted strengthening the law (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). These later amendments and the 2001 reauthorization incorporated stronger civil rights and antidiscrimination protections, better supporting youths and families facing homelessness. The 2001 reauthorization also focused on three primary principles: “expanding school choice, mandating immediate school action, and creating supportive infrastructures” (Howland et al., 2017, p. 269).

While there are positives and strengths to the federal action on homelessness via the McKinney-Vento Act, there are also noted shortfalls in the research that continue to negatively impact implementation. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) discussed and reiterated the funding issue with MVA, stating “the Act simply does not provide sufficient funding to implement its mandates” (p. 60). Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) also alluded to funding concerns, while also presenting that districts may not be prioritizing homelessness in their budget. In the 2015 amendment of MVA, $85 million was appropriated for the fiscal years of 2017-2020, a decrease from the $100 million that was
appropriated in the 2008 amendment. While $85 million is a large amount of money, it has to be then distributed to 50 different states, which then are responsible for distributing it to the school districts in their state. In addition to the funding concerns, research has questioned the academic impact of MVA. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) conducted a study in North Carolina, finding that there was not a significant impact on academic achievement for students identified as homeless. They did discuss the positive impact on students, “including transportation, ease of registration, school supplies, and some health issues” (p. 179), but could not identify an academic impact. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) argued that the “fundamental purpose of education is academic” (p. 181), so more research needs to be conducted to evaluate if MVA has had a positive impact on students experiencing homelessness. There is, though, room for argument on if the primary purpose of MVA is academic or if it is to provide stability for the youth, allowing them to stay socially engaged in their school setting.

**State Action**

The McKinney-Vento Act is the federal legislation which then creates statewide action and accountability. Each state is required to have a state coordinator that oversees the implementation of MVA for their state. Howland et al. (2017) discussed results from a 2006 survey of state coordinators, focusing on the barriers state coordinators identified. In their research, Howland et al. (2017) reported that state coordinators communicated the following barriers to implementation: “(a) the scope of professional responsibilities of the homeless liaisons; (b) lack of awareness of the law among school personnel; (c) transportation to the school of origin; (d) access to school programs and services; (e) limited community participation…” (p. 274). These barriers identified by state
coordinators cause an opportunity to pause and reflect on the implementation of MVA both at the state and local level. Morgan (2018) further drove in the need for such a pause and reflection, stating “the problems associated with failing to provide sufficient services for homeless youth will likely continue unless a different approach is implemented” (p. 220). Some of these concerns may be tied to the concerns surrounding a lack of appropriate funding for the implementation of MVA. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) called for an evaluation of how MVA funds are used and what their impact is on students. Such an evaluation would assist in identifying to what extent funding is an issue and, in addition, best practices in the use of funds appropriated for complying with MVA.

When examining the impact of the McKinney-Vento Act in Missouri, no literature was located. Literature was identified on the implementation of MVA at the state level in other states, though. There is a need for each state to have their own laws that help to strengthen the purpose, and accountability, of the Act. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) provided the context of MVA in Illinois, where the state legislature also created their own state policy to ensure the Act is implemented appropriately, while also providing additional educational rights to youth experiencing homelessness. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) also explored the Illinois legislation, explaining that such legislation became necessary after multiple court battles in which local school districts were not complying with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. The state legislation focused on solidifying the rights provided by the Act. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) discussed the barriers to implementing MVA in Hawaii, which also culminated in multiple court battles. State-specific legislation helps to strengthen the accountability system that is supposed to be in place, as designed by federal law.
Local Action

The 1990 amendment to the Act required that each school district have a local education liaison specific to homelessness. This liaison “has the critical responsibility of ensuring that students enroll in and succeed in school and receive all services for which they are eligible” (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014, p. 147). This individual is crucial to the strong implementation of MVA within their district. To ensure this work can be accomplished, Howland et al. (2017) provided the recommendation that “liaisons be solely designated, and ideally full-time positions, in order to have sufficient time, resources, and professional training to carry out duties indicated by the Act” (p. 274). However, it is essential that all staff are aware of the policies and rights designed for youths experiencing homelessness, as many different staff will work with these families and need to be able to appropriately support them (Canfield et al., 2017). As identified by Hendricks and Barkley (2012), though, MVA lacks clarity on required training for social workers, teachers, counselors, and other relevant school staff. This lacking component negatively impacts the likelihood that staff are regularly meeting the needs of students that are homeless.

As also discussed at the federal and state level, funding continues to be a concern at the local level. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) discussed that districts that have great financial constraints struggle to meet the requirements of the Act. Shields and Warke (2010) emphasized this struggle, too, acknowledging that funding issues contribute to the difficulty in “developing sustained relationships with these [homeless] families and adequately supporting sustained student learning” (p. 790). A related, but separate struggle, is in providing transportation for students who no longer live within the school
boundaries, requiring a bus to be specifically routed for the new address, one which the
bus would not typically go to on their route. Providing this transportation is more
complicated than it would appear and, as a consequence, is typically not as immediate as
demanded by MVA (Howland et al., 2017).

Recognizing that local implementation of MVA is a struggle for districts, while
also recognizing the complexities of homelessness, research calls for homelessness to be
treated as a community issue instead of just a school issue. To address the impact of
homelessness, communities must take a collaborative approach to helping families to
overcome the barriers (Howland et al., 2017; Miller, 2009; Tobin & Murphy, 2013). While
collaboration is viewed as necessary, Pavlakis (2018) found that “community
collaboration was often limited” (p. 1064). To address these issues with community
collaboration, districts and community partners must focus on developing effective and
efficient lines of open communication, allowing for the issue of homelessness to be
combated (Miller, 2009; Swick & Bailey, 2004).

**Process Evaluation Framework**

In the literature presented so far, it is clear that the implementation of the
McKinney-Vento Act in Missouri needs to be evaluated. The process evaluation
framework could be one tool used to guide such an evaluation. Rossi et al. (2019)
explained and presented why process evaluation should be part of any program, as it is
necessary to evaluate if the program/process is being implemented as designed.
According to Rossi et al. (2019), “process evaluation is usually directed at one or both of
two key questions: (a) whether a program is reaching the appropriate target population
and (b) whether its service delivery and support functions are consistent with the program
design specifications…” (p. 93). The necessity for a process evaluation is that simply having a great design does not equate to having a great program; implementation must also be strong for the program to be successful. To help provide clarity to the reader in this section, Rossi et al. (2019) explained the difference between process evaluation and impact evaluation, recognizing that the focus of process evaluation is on design and implementation, whereas an impact evaluation is focused on the impact of the program on beneficiaries of the program. This distinction will be honored, with this section focusing on process evaluation and, more specifically, implementation. Throughout this section, the terms process and program will be used interchangeably, as the literature treats these similarly and authors use both with similar meaning.

Implementation fidelity is a key component of process evaluation, as a process is unlikely to be successful if the implementation is lacking. Peters et al. (2013) defined implementation research as “the scientific inquiry into questions concerning implementation—the act of carrying an intention into effect, which in health research can be policies, programmes, or individual practices (collectively called interventions)” (p. 1). This definition connects well to the purpose of process evaluation, as inquiry should drive the questions that will guide the process evaluation, of which a key component is implementation fidelity. Additionally, Peters et al. (2013) presented the principles of implementation research, which “seeks to understand and work within real world conditions; context plays a central role; concerned with the users of the research and not purely production of knowledge” (pp. 1-2). Of specific note, and tie to Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation, is the principle of being concerned with users. Implementation fidelity, as defined by Rossi et al. (2019), is “the extent to which the program adheres to
the program theory and design and usually includes such particulars as the amount of service received by the participants and the quality with which those services are delivered” (p. 98). The principles of implementation research and the definition of implementation fidelity both have a focus on users/participants. Such users or participants could be those responsible for implementation or could be those that are to benefit from implementation. Carroll et al. (2007) characterized the purpose of implementation fidelity as serving as a “potential moderator of the relationship between interventions and their intended outcomes” (p. 1). Furthermore, assessing implementation fidelity is an essential step to complete prior to conducting an impact evaluation in the future (Rossi et al., 2019; Wholey, 1987).

Program process theory is the foundation of process evaluation (Bickman, 1987; Rossi et al., 2019). Bickman (1987) and Wholey (1987) referred to this theory as program theory. Bickman (1987) presented the function of program theory as: (a) contributing to social science knowledge; (b) assisting policymakers; (c) discriminating between program failure and theory failure; (d) identifying the problem and target group; (e) providing program implementation description; (f) uncovering unintended effects; (g) specifying intervening variables; (h) improving formative use of evaluation; (i) clarifying measurement issues; and, (j) improving consensus formation. Bickman (1987) contends that if program theory is utilized in program evaluation, these 10 benefits can be experienced. To support the development of program theory, Wholey (1987) explained that an evaluability assessment needs to be conducted to allow for a program evaluation to be useful. According to Wholey (1987):
Evaluability assessment clarifies program intent from the points of view of key actors in and around the program; explores program reality to clarify the plausibility of program objectives and the feasibility of performance measurements; and identifies opportunities to change program resources, activities, objectives, and uses of information in ways likely to improve program performance. (p. 78)

Bickman (1987) and Wholey (1987) argued for the importance of strong, sound theory to guide evaluations, as the lack of such is likely to result in an evaluation that lacks relevance and is unlikely to be useful.

**Change Logic Model**

Another tool that would be of use in evaluating the implementation of MVA in Missouri would be a change logic model. Bardach and Patashnik (2020) stated the “most commonly applied evaluative procedure is to generate what are known as logic models. This involves spelling out in some detail, and often with the help of graphic aids, how the emerging system is supposed to work” (p. 127). McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) explained that a logic model is a foundation for sharing what the program is expected to do. A logic model is a common-sense approach to predicting, and evaluating, how a program will address identified challenges (Newcomer et al., 2015). A logic model allows for an evaluator to “describe a theory of change and to develop program elements” (Helitzer et al., 2010, p. 223).

McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) stated a logic model has many benefits, including creating common understanding, assisting in program design and ongoing improvement, communicating the program’s placement in an organization, and allowing for accurate
data collection and usefulness. Logic models can also be useful because evaluators have
the opportunity to be involved with the initial planning stages of program design, versus
being brought in later to see if the program worked (Helitzer et al., 2010). The primary
benefit of creating a logic model during program design is that it will assist in ensuring
the program is being evaluated in a way that honors the fundamental principles of the
program (Helitzer et al., 2010). A logic model is also of use as it allows for there to be an
opportunity to reflect on if the outcomes goals are indeed achievable (McLaughlin &
Jordan, 1999). Newcomer et al. (2015) also advocated for using a logic model as they
“more comprehensively address the increasing requirements for both outcomes
measurement and measurement of how the program is being implemented to allow for
improvement” (p. 67).

McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) provided a five-stage process for building a logic
model, as seen in Figure 4. Before beginning the process, though, it is important that
there is a diverse presence of all stakeholders involved to assist in building the logic
model (Helitzer et al., 2010; Newcomer et al., 2015). Involving stakeholders will
strengthen the logic model as this process will “require stakeholders to state explicitly
how they think program activities and resources will lead to the predicted outcomes” (p.
224). Newcomer et al. (2015) also explained that logic models should be light on
organizational jargon, as jargon can lead to a lack of clarity and reduce understanding. It
is also important to remember that the logic model needs to be tied to the long-term
culture of the program, not a one-time component (Newcomer et al., 2015).
McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Framework

Within Section I, a framework was described which has been created for this research. The purpose of the framework is to be able to identify a well-implemented McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, at the state level. For the purpose of this study, implementation in Missouri is being evaluated. The framework identifies specific components which need to be in place for it to be determined that the Act is being implemented well. Comprising the framework are five specific components, which will be further described and explored in this section. The five components are: Educational Opportunities, Enrollment, Identification and Needs of Homeless Children/Youths, Professional Development for Staff, and Rights.

The first component of the framework is Educational Opportunities. Within this component, the focus is on ensuring homeless children and youths have the opportunities to meet rigorous academic standards, access public preschool programs, access academic and extracurricular activities, and that parents/guardians of homeless children are aware of the educational and related opportunities available to their children. Tobin and Murphy (2013) called for schools to own their important role in helping students who are homeless experience academic success. To accomplish such, they called for teachers to be trained in flexible instructional methods that simultaneously target remediation and
enrichment. Losinski et al. (2013) helped provide the necessity for this, recognizing homelessness has a dramatic impact on children, including their academic performance. While supporting students in their academic success is important, it is also complex and calls for LEAs to be intentional in creating partnerships which further support these students academically (Miller, 2010). Educational opportunities begin prior to kindergarten and MVA incorporates this reality by requiring public, free preschool opportunities to be available to children experiencing homelessness. Shields and Warke (2010) stated that 34% of the homeless population are families who have children; these children need to be able to access preschool programs to help address potential achievement gaps (Duffield, 2001; Masten et al., 2015).

Participating in school activities is a key way for homeless students to feel connected with their school environment, aligning with the educational opportunities that are expected to be made accessible to them. However, Tanabe and Mobley (2011) explained many schools are not compliant with this, regularly not allowing students to participate due to fees or transportation issues. Tobin and Murphy (2013) reinforced the importance for this issue to not exist, though, as students experiencing homelessness being able to participate in activities reduced their feelings of isolation, instead giving them feelings of social connections and support. Furthermore, it is essential parents and guardians are aware of these, and other, opportunities available to their children; however, Losinski et al. (2013) explained the lack of communication between LEAs and parents/guardians were of negative impact on this issue. As well, these families are regularly left feeling “vulnerable, alone, and incapable of navigating the often elaborate
bureaucratic regulations that can be a part of receiving services” (Losinski et al., 2013, p. 95).

The second component of the MVA framework is Enrollment. This component focuses on ensuring LEAs have policies in place around enrollment, that school placement is made regardless of who the child is living with, enrollment never be delayed due to missing documentation/records, the enrolling school should immediately contact the last school for records, students are always allowed to attend the feeder school, and that homeless youth be enrolled at the school where it is sought even if there is a dispute surrounding enrollment. In an examination of MVA in North Carolina, Hendricks and Barkley (2012) explored the impact of MVA. While they questioned the academic impact of the law, they acknowledged the Act made it easier to register in new schools. Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) explored the impact of residential instability, stating residency requirements are a barrier to homeless youth as their residential instability does not allow for proof of residency. As well, schools can significantly delay enrollment based on these requirements, even though the Act explicitly does not allow for such requirements. They also explained a previous issue with an earlier version of the Act in which students were not enrolled if they did not have a parent or legal guardian enrolling them; this reality made it to where some children were not allowed to enroll in school. Howland et al. (2017) presented the major impacts of the MVA reauthorization, which was focused on “expanding school choice, mandating school action, and creating supportive infrastructures” (p. 269).

The third component of the framework is Identification and Needs of Homeless Children/Youths. The focus of this component is that each state much have a Coordinator
for Education of Homeless Children and Youths, LEAs must designate a staff member as their Homeless Liaison, LEAs must adopt policies and practices which guarantee transportation to homeless youths, and state coordinators and LEAs must inform stakeholders of the duties of the Homeless Liaison for the LEA. Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) explored the duties of the state coordinators and LEA liaisons, which were mandated by the MVA. The state coordinator oversees the state Office of Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and ensures the state is carrying out the MVA. They are also expected to provide support and learning to the LEAs and homeless liaisons (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). As well, each district is required to have a homeless liaison, who is “responsible for ensuring the smooth matriculation into school and associated school programs that homeless students require, as well as facilitating the education of school personnel and parents regarding the rights guaranteed under the McKinney-Vento Act” (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006, p. 41). These two roles play a key role in helping to identify and support homeless children and youths. In addition, while transportation is mandated by the Act, Howland et al. (2017) recognized providing transportation can be very complicated for large districts, contributing to increased absences for students while they wait for transportation to be planned. It is essential LEAs have policies in place which reduces this reality.

The fourth component of the framework is Professional Development for Staff. Within this component are the targets of the homeless liaison ensuring school personnel participate in professional development about supporting students experiencing homelessness, that the homeless liaison receives professional development for their role as a liaison, and that the state Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and
Youths provide professional learning experiences to the LEAs throughout the state. Clemens et al. (2018) stated an essential finding from their research was all school staff needs to have professional learning focused on what is homelessness, the signs a student may be facing homelessness, and who their homeless liaison is in the district. Canfield (2014) called for this training to also include ways to collaborate with outside providers to help meet the many needs of children experiencing homelessness. Swick and Bailey (2004) agreed with this focus, calling for interagency links so the community can collectively work to support families experiencing homelessness, or at-risk of becoming homeless. To maximize learning and support, Howland et al. (2017) stressed homeless liaisons should be full-time positions, partly so they can focus on the professional training duties present in MVA. Homeless liaisons being full-time would allow for them to ensure all school staff has an appropriate amount of training related to this topic, which is crucial to best supporting homeless children (Masten et al., 2015).

The fifth, and final, component of the framework is Rights. This component of the framework is the most in-depth and has some overlap with the previous four components since they also tie to the MVA, which is a law focused on the rights of students facing homelessness. There are 10 specific objectives within this component. The objectives focus on ensuring the following: the public knows the rights of homeless children; a child experiencing homelessness can stay in their school of origin and must be integrated into the mainstream setting, while also outlining the process for handling a dispute around enrollment; parents/guardians must be fully informed of transportation services; comparable services must be available to homeless youths; a lack of health records and immunizations cannot delay enrollment; and, the Coordinator for Education of Homeless
Children and Youths will respond to all inquiries from parents/guardians and will ensure homeless children are receiving full protections and services provided by the Act. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) explored the battle in Illinois surrounding the rights of homeless students and their families. They explored how the state continually did not comply with MVA, meaning students were not receiving the rights guaranteed to them via the Act. As a result, significant litigation played out over more than two decades. The legal battle in Illinois eventually impacted the current McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. In addition, the state of Illinois created and passed their own legislation which further reinforced the rights of homeless students and their families. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) identified the following provisions present in the reauthorized MVA, many of which reflect the Illinois law:

- Immediate enrollment;
- Broad definition of homelessness;
- Definition of enrollment to include ‘attending classes and participating fully in school activities’;
- Designation of a homeless liaison in each school district;
- Requirements for public notice of the educational rights of homeless students;
- Providing school stability by giving students the choice to remain in the school of origin;
- Requiring districts to ensure transportation is provided to the school of origin and requiring districts to work together to share cost and responsibility;
- Protecting students from segregation in separate schools;
• Requiring districts to give special attention to those children and youth who are not currently enrolled in school;

• Increasing the authorized funding for the program to $70 million.

These rights are foundational to an increase in homeless children being enrolled in school (Duffield, 2001). In an evaluation of homelessness in Hawaii, Tanabe and Mobley (2011) concurred with the need for the rights outlined above, recognizing MVA “has addressed many of the most important barriers affecting the education of homeless children; however, it has fallen short in its implementation due to a lack of funding” (p. 62).

Conclusion

Since the initial creation of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, research has been conducted, aimed at identifying how to better understand homelessness and, as a result, support families in such a position. Additionally, research exists surrounding the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in certain states, but no research was located specific to implementation in Missouri. Research is needed specifically about the implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri. Such research could be instrumental in influencing future federal, state, and local action. As well, recognizing school principals are a vital component of local action, such research will stress the importance of school principals prioritizing the needs of their students experiencing homelessness, as stressed by Shields & Warke (2010). Throughout this literature review, you have been provided definitions of homelessness, statistics surrounding the number of youths experiencing homelessness, the realities of homelessness, the need for connecting with such families, and the need for federal, state, and local action. Additionally, relevant frameworks were explored: Rossi et al.’s (2019)
process evaluation framework, McLaughlin and Jordan’s (1999) logic model, and a framework for evaluating the implementation of MVA at the state level.
SECTION IV: CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRACTICE

To be adapted into a presentation and shared with the Missouri Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals, during their annual conference; also, I will submit to their publication to share a consolidated version of this report.
Homelessness is a reality that continues to be experienced by a growing number of people throughout the United States of America (Morgan, 2018). This reality is having an impact, also, on our K-12 public schools. Schools continue to be faced with navigating how to best support students and families that are experiencing homelessness. In an attempt to provide schools guidance, a mandate came from the federal government, currently referred to as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA). This research was targeted at understanding if the Act was being implemented as it was written, using data collected from homeless liaisons within Missouri. The findings of this research explore that data and answer the research questions guiding this work. Furthermore, the researcher desires for school administrators to be able to evaluate their compliance with the Act. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher equips school administrators with tools to best support students experiencing homelessness. The implementation may be different based on school districts that are urban, suburban, or rural, so the tools provided need to be able to be used by a variety of intended users.

**Statement of the Problem**

As homelessness continues to grow, so will the number of youths who are identified as homeless within K-12 schools. This growth recognizes educators must become increasingly knowledgeable of the challenges of homelessness, as well as how to help support students in such a position. Students experiencing homelessness may have decreased attendance, lower academic performance, and may require additional attention (Shields & Warke, 2010). These factors may incentivize administrators to avoid classifying a student as homeless; therefore, requiring the students to transition to a different school based on the child’s new school of residence. It is necessary to evaluate
if the McKinney-Vento Act, as written and implemented, provides the desired supports for students experiencing homelessness.

When examining current literature, there appears to be a lack of research conducted surrounding the implementation of McKinney-Vento in Missouri. Recognizing states have the discretion to create their own plans for implementation, it is important to specifically evaluate implementation in Missouri. Contributing to concern is that finding information regarding MVA on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website is challenging—this may be representative of a lack of expectations around implementation. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) explored a lack of compliance with the McKinney Act in Chicago Public Schools, which led to the creation of state law. The Illinois state law contributed to amending the Stewart B. McKinney Act in 2002 as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. The amendment in 2002 also renamed the McKinney Act to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, with the amendment incorporating many of the components from the Illinois law, the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act. The research conducted by Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) focused on compliance in the state of Illinois, which could be of benefit in guiding research in the state of Missouri.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate if the implementation of MVA in Missouri was happening as designed. In 1987, the United States Congress recognized the growing issue of homelessness amongst youth in the United States. To address this issue, Congress acted and passed the Stewart B. McKinney Act. In the 30+ years since the Act, homelessness has continued to persist and grow (Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis, 2018; Shields
& Warke, 2010). The intent of this study was to evaluate the implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri; such an evaluation assists in providing administrators and school districts with strategies to best support their students and families experiencing homelessness. Understanding the realities of homelessness allows educators to take a supportive stance rooted in empathy (Clemens et al., 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

While the research questions guided the findings of this study, the hypothesis was that implementation was a concern. One immediate reason for this hypothesis was prior research conducted (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014; Shields & Warke, 2010; Tanabe & Mobley, 2011) highlighted implementation issues in other states. Additionally, based on current work in the field, the researcher had experienced implementation concerns. This study provides the opportunity for the implementation of MVA to be strengthened. Increased implementation will better support families, partly due to increased knowledge for the homeless liaisons and other necessary staff.

This study was carried out utilizing mixed methods, allowing for the data to be understood at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data collection to help explain the quantitative results. A pragmatic parallel mixed methods design was utilized, in which “qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed to answer a single study’s research questions” (Mertens, 2020, p. 322). The quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, allowing each to help better answer the research questions.
**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?
2. In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

These two questions guided the research, focusing primarily on implementing the Act. Without appropriate implementation it is unrealistic to conduct a proper evaluation of MVA, calling for an implementation evaluation to be conducted. The following sections explain how such an evaluation was conducted, consistently tying back to those two research questions.

**Design of the Study**

This research utilized a pragmatic parallel mixed methods design, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative work (Mertens, 2020). This design was utilized as both qualitative and quantitative data were collected sequentially, with minimal lag time in between (Mertens, 2020). These data were integrated to contribute to the findings, implications, and discussion components of the study. This section will further describe the design of this study, focusing on setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

**Setting**

The setting for the research was all 518 K-8 and K-12 public school districts within the state of Missouri. Access to each district was sought via their identified homeless liaison. Specific districts were highlighted through the qualitative portion of the
research. Districts were selected based on liaisons identifying they were willing to participate in an interview on the survey distributed to all liaisons. Districts were categorized using the definitions as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). At the time of research, DESE tracked this classification using the previous metro-centric locale codes, which are: Large City, Mid-size City, Urban Fringe of a Large City, Urban Fringe of a Mid-size City, Large Town, Small Town, Rural (Outside MSA), and Rural (Inside MSA). For the purpose of this research, the eight NCES categories were reduced to four categories: City, Suburb, Town, Rural. When surveyed, however, participants self-identified if their district was Urban, Suburban, or Rural, as the survey was anonymous so the researcher could not identify the participants based on the four NCES codes. When examining the 518 districts, their distribution amongst the four categories were: 12 were City, 73 were Suburb, 58 were Town, 375 were Rural. Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was utilized to select specific participants from each of those four groupings, dependent on those that responded to the survey that they were willing to participate in interviews. Three districts were selected from each of these four classifications. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated researchers should use purposeful sampling to obtain specific components from their participants, to discover, gain insight, and become better informed during the research process.

**Participants**

For the research, all 518 Missouri public school homeless liaisons and their supervisors were invited via email to participate. On the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, a list identified the homeless liaison for
each district. Within the email invitation, liaisons were asked to share the survey with their supervisor. The target was to have a minimum of 100 liaisons complete the survey, with an additional target of at least 50 supervisors completing the survey. It was anticipated there were 518 supervisors, matching the number of liaisons. Those individuals were recruited via email. If all 518 liaisons, along with the 518 supervisors, responded they would all have been included in the data analysis and findings portion specific to the survey. Within the survey, there was a question that asked the participant to identify if they were the liaison or the supervisor of the liaison. Within the survey, they selected if they identified their district as being urban, suburban, or rural. Interviews were then conducted with liaisons who indicated such willingness on their survey. Interviewees were selected using random sampling (Fink, 2017). To aid in the random selection of those 12 districts, interview volunteers were first separated into the four categories of City, Suburb, Town, or Rural. Then, a random name selector website was utilized to select the three districts from each of the four categories. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Survey participants remained anonymous while interview participants remained confidential.

Data Collection

To collect data, a mixed methods survey (Appendix A) was emailed to potential participants. Within the survey was the informed consent. Qualtrics was utilized for survey creation, data collection, and descriptive statistics. Within the survey were quantitative items utilizing a Likert rating scale, as well as open-ended qualitative items. The items were written in a way to help evaluate the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the state of Missouri. The survey data allowed for an analysis of how
liaisons and their supervisors feel MVA is being implemented in their districts and the state of Missouri. As well, they were able to provide perspective on potential barriers that may be in place if implementation is lacking. The use of a survey increased the number of homeless liaisons and supervisors who were able to participate in the study.

Additionally, to acquire the qualitative data, interviews were held with 11 total participants. All of the interviews were recorded for the purpose of creating a transcript of the interview. After the interview, each transcript was downloaded for later analysis. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom, using an interview protocol. Semi-structured interviewing is a medium between structured and unstructured interviewing, in which there is a balance of more and less structured questions. The questions, then, were used flexibly, and the central part of the interview was dedicated to topics the researcher anticipated would be explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative interviewing was utilized because, as stated by Seidman (2019), it is a “basic mode of inquiry” (p. 8). The interview protocol was created to help in assessing the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. The researcher intended to conduct interviews with three liaisons from each of the four categories of city, suburb, town, and rural; however, there were only two participants who agreed to be interviewed from the city category.

Data collection also took place using the websites of twelve randomly selected school districts. This collection was guided by the use of an artifact analysis protocol tool. These districts were selected at random using a random number picker via Google. Three districts were selected from each of the four categories. The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate if school districts were providing information to families
surrounding MVA. This analysis helped to support if school districts were clearly communicating the rights provided to families experiencing homelessness, as provided by MVA.

**Data Analysis**

Twelve school districts were selected randomly, using a stratified random sample in which districts were first categorized prior to selection, for an analysis of what was present on their websites relevant to MVA/homelessness. An analysis protocol tool was utilized to guide this work. To also aid in credibility and creating an audit trail, a screenshot was taken of the websites analyzed. The protocol examined what information was accessible on the website, including: the liaison’s name and contact information, an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act, protections/accommodations available to students protected by MVA, resources that can be provided to support families experiencing homelessness. For the 12 districts, there were three from each of the four classifications.

A document analysis was also conducted on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, using the same protocol used on the 12 districts. The purpose of this analysis was to identify how well the state clarifies what MVA provides for families experiencing homelessness.

Descriptive statistics for quantitative surveys, as described by Fink (2017) and Mertens (2020), were utilized. The focus of these descriptive statistics was on the frequencies and percentages of the data. Fink (2017) explained that descriptive statistics allow for a basic description of both the sample and responses while also allowing for charts to be created that explain what the data communicated. Mertens (2020) captured descriptive statistics as “summarizing data on a single variable” (p. 443). The focus of
these descriptive statistics will be to communicate the responses on the Likert scales present in the survey.

For the qualitative components of the research, qualitative coding and qualitative data analysis, as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), were employed. The interviews were recorded, allowing for a transcript of each interview to be created. To analyze the transcripts, excerpts from the interviews were categorized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019). After categorizing excerpts for each interview, emergent themes surfaced and were named. Following the initial coding, the emergent themes were reduced to an appropriate number of consolidated categories. This data then contributed significantly to the findings section of the study.

**Findings**

This section will explore the findings identified after analyzing data collected via a survey, interviews, and an artifact analysis. In total, there were 103 participants in the survey. Of the 103 participants, 89 of them identified as the homeless liaison for their district. As well, 97 of the participants had a master's degree or higher. Survey participants were also asked to self-identify if they identified their district as being urban, suburban, or rural—83 of the participants identified their district as rural. It is important to note that this question relied on the participants self-identifying not connecting to the NCES codes previously explained, as the participants were anonymous and the researcher could not ensure all participants would know their district's NCES classification. Of the 103 participants, 96 identified their district enrollment as being less than 10,000. The full demographic data for each of the 103 participants and their school districts can be found in Table 1.
Table 1

Demographics of the Participants and their School Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of the following best applies to you? (N=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The supervisor of the liaison for homeless student services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.59% (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your highest degree obtained? (N=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.94% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you identify your district as urban, suburban, or rural? (N=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.88% (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the total enrollment of your district? (N=103)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2,999 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.55% (84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to understand to what extent MVA is being implemented throughout Missouri, primarily utilizing a quantitative lens. When participants were questioned as to how well their district implements MVA, 76.6% strongly agreed or agreed that they are implementing MVA well, with a total of 93.6% responding favorably, as seen in Table 2. When interviewing participants, six of the 11
participants stated their district is doing a good, or better, job of meeting the requirements of MVA.

Table 2

**Likert Survey Responses for Research Question 1**

| Our district implements the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act well. (N=94) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1.06% (1) | 4.26% (4) | 17.02% (16) | 53.19% (50) | 23.40% (22) |

| Our district sufficiently meets the needs of students experiencing homelessness. (N=94) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 0.00% (0) | 3.19% (3) | 9.57% (9) | 64.89% (61) | 22.34% (21) |

| Our staff receives adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. (N=94) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1.06% (1) | 6.38% (6) | 21.28% (20) | 48.94% (46) | 19.15% (18) |

| As a homeless liaison, or a supervisor of a homeless liaison, I have received adequate training in how to oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. (N=79) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 2.53% (2) | 6.33% (5) | 20.25% (16) | 40.51% (32) | 24.05% (19) |

Building off the previous item, participants were then asked if they sufficiently meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Participants scored themselves
better within this component: 96.8% responded favorably overall, with 87.2% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they meet the needs of their students experiencing homelessness. These data are contradicted by some of the interview participants, though. Some of the participants acknowledged that meeting the compliance requirements of MVA does not always mean they are utilizing the best practices in supporting families and students experiencing homelessness. Four of the 11 interview participants specifically discussed or connected to this feeling, where one interview participant scored themselves as getting a 75% in meeting the requirements of MVA, but only a 50-60% in meeting the needs of the people they are supporting.

The next two Likert-scale responses within the survey centered on training: the first item evaluated the training staff received regarding how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness, while the second item evaluated the training the liaison, or supervisor, has received in how to oversee the implementation of MVA within their district. As seen in Table 2, 68.1% of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed the staff within their district received adequate training pertaining to identifying and supporting students who are homeless. Overall, 89.4% responded favorably, which included slightly agreeing with the statement. An interview participant conveyed they see this as a key responsibility of their job, as they must ensure they are helping staff to understand what to watch for in identifying students that may be experiencing homelessness. This data aligns closely with the question regarding if liaisons and supervisors felt they had received adequate training in overseeing the implementation of MVA, as 64.5% of the survey participants strongly agreed or agreed they had, with 84.8% responding favorably overall. Multiple interview participants, though, discussed a
need for more training and support, including a desire for in-person training. One
participant noted that it may be useful for districts to be connected to a mentor district, as
some districts do not regularly experience students being identified as homeless leaving
them less equipped to meet the needs of students and families experiencing
homelessness.

The artifact analysis data align with implying some districts are not being as
impacted by homelessness due to a complete absence of any information for a family
experiencing homelessness. Of the six rural or town districts analyzed, only one listed
their homeless liaison on their website, with all six not having any information about
student homelessness. Comparatively, four of the six suburb or city districts listed their
homeless liaison, with all four also including additional information regarding student
homelessness.

Research Question 2

The second research question for the study was “In what ways is the McKinney-
Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?” This research question was
analyzed from a predominantly qualitative lens, focusing on what the participants of the
survey and interview said regarding the ways they implemented MVA within their
district. The themes which emerged while analyzing survey and interview responses were
access to necessary resources, stability, and relationships/connections.

Provide Access to Resources

The strongest theme that emerged was the need to provide access to resources that
may be considered basic or essential needs. Within the survey, participants were asked to
share the services available to their students experiencing homelessness. A key service
identified was having access to transportation, identified by 31 survey participants and 7 interview participants. Both survey and interview participants described providing access to food and clothing, through a variety of avenues—three participants specifically mentioned on-site clothing resources as a vital resource for students. One interview participant identified that if they did not have the community supporting their clothing closets, spread throughout their school buildings, they would not be able to meet this need on their own. Other participants shared that they do support the food needs of their students experiencing homelessness via a food bag program in which food goes home with the student each weekend; they also shared that this program is not just for students experiencing homelessness, but for any student that has a food need. Of the survey participants, 14 participants also discussed the need for students to have access to counseling services due to their circumstances. Only 15 survey participants discussed the need for academic supports, which is a required component of MVA and reflected in the framework for evaluating MVA implementation, which was explained previously.

Provide Stability

The next most dominant theme that emerged with interview participants was the overarching need to provide stability for these students, recognizing that their home lives are in a state of chaos. Each interview participant also discussed the need to ensure immediate enrollment was present for these students and their families. To accomplish this work, nine of the 11 interview participants described their district social workers as being crucial, while the other two interview participants explained they did not have social workers and instead relied on building school counselors. Additionally, seven survey participants specifically mentioned the use of district social workers. However,
there may be a lack of understanding of how being doubled-up negatively impacts a student and their family. In two interviews, participants spoke of being doubled-up as lesser of a challenge and that, as a result, the liaisons did not need to check in with these families like they do their other families. However, the Act recognizes doubled-up as a type of homelessness, also creating instability for the student and their family.

**Develop Relationships**

The next most common theme, the importance and value of relationships and personal connection, emerged when examining how liaisons and districts make families aware of the services available to them if they are experiencing homelessness. The primary way survey participants identified they made families aware of services available to them was by making personal contact, following the family being identified; some of the provided resources came from the district, while others relied on a referral to a community agency. Of the survey participants, 46 participants specifically mentioned making personal contact, also discussing the use of their district websites, pamphlets and fliers, and relying on their community partnerships to increase awareness. While 15 survey participants identified the use of their district websites as a tool in making families aware of available resources, only 3 of the 12 district websites analyzed during the artifact analysis had any information about resources for families experiencing homelessness; those three districts were coded as suburb or city.

**Promptly and Accurately Identify**

Another component analyzed was how districts identified students experiencing homelessness, as the implementation of MVA relies on accurate and prompt identification. When surveyed, 53 participants communicated that a key element of their
identification process occurs during enrollment. However, when identifying students who are currently enrolled, but have become homeless, the identification process varied. Some participants discussed they rely on teacher and counselor observation, while others discussed word of mouth as a way they become aware of families who may now be experiencing homelessness. Many districts identified identification as a key area in which they have improved, while also acknowledging identification can be the most challenging aspect. One participant acknowledged this challenge and provided how they approach it, stating:

This is a team effort. Everyone in the district is trained to recognize signs of possible homelessness and they refer. We have identifying questions in the student enrollment fields that families fill out annually; intake staff are trained to ask probing questions when needed and refer a family directly during enrollment; families can refer others; students and families can self-refer; and this year we are trying to cross-reference duplicate addresses for different families (looking for doubled up) that don't self-disclose.

Communicate with Families

The next component focused on how liaisons and districts communicate with families identified as homeless. Once again, the importance and value of relationships and connections emerged. Within the survey, 34 responses referred to the use of phone calls, texting, and emailing. In addition, respondents referred to the use of face-to-face meetings and communication, both during the identification process and in the ongoing support of the family. Four survey participants and three interview participants identified they utilize home visits as a communication method with their families experiencing
homelessness. When interviewing the city and suburb participants, all five identified they had social workers, which served as a vital way in which they communicate with and support their families identified as homeless. One interview participant, though, acknowledged some of their agenda in staying in contact with these families was so that they can ensure no one is staying identified as homeless when they really are not, as some families lie to them, stating that those families are “committing educational larceny”. As well, another interview participant stated they do not have much communication with their homeless families, as they are all doubled-up and “do not need much”.

Focus on the Homeless Student

The final component examined what participants felt were the pillars of MVA. Participants were asked, “What do you view to be the pillars of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?” Of all the participants, 67 responded to this question. Their responses were then put into a WordCloud, narrowing the responses down to themes that were shared three or more times. The most frequent themes were students, access, and support. Each of these themes focuses more on the individual experiencing homelessness versus just focusing on being compliant with MVA. The WordCloud can be further explored in Figure 1.

Summary of Findings

When examining the findings, data were collected from a survey taken by 103 participants, interviews conducted with 11 participants, and by conducting 12 artifact analyses. Emerging from the qualitative data were the themes of access to needed resources, stability, and the importance and value of relationships and connections.
The quantitative data, which largely was tied to the survey, attempted to answer the first research question regarding the extent of implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri. The qualitative data attempted to answer the second research question, which examined the ways MVA was being implemented in Missouri. All of the data acquired via a mixed methods approach helped best explore the research questions and provide the foundation for providing recommendations tied to this study.

When answering research question one, which focused on MVA implementation, the study determined districts are compliant with the requirements of the Act. Almost all participants answered favorably that their district was implementing MVA well. However, less than two-thirds of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had received adequate training—not exemplary training, but adequate. This reality points to the likelihood that districts are compliant with the requirements of MVA, but are not exceeding the expectations and have areas of improvement that would better support their
students experiencing homelessness. After conducting all interviews, the qualitative data would support this stance, as some participants spoke to practices in place that clearly exceeded the Act, also exceeding the work some other districts were doing within the area of supporting students and families experiencing homelessness. As well, almost three-fourths of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that district staff received adequate training. This need for improved training may also improve school staff in understanding the impact of being doubled-up, as some participants identified being doubled-up as a minimal impact not requiring as much support.

The second research question, which explored the ways MVA was being implemented, was answered throughout the different findings of the survey. Specifically, it was identified that a key element of implementation focuses on identification and enrollment processes. While survey participants identified identification as a much-improved strength, interview participants pointed to some challenges of their districts utilizing online enrollment, as enrollment is a primary time in which identification occurred. As well, participants identified the importance of immediate enrollment for students experiencing homelessness, assisting in providing stability for that student population. Another key area that participants pointed to as important was providing transportation to students experiencing homelessness. Transportation assisted in removing a barrier that may have kept students from being able to stay at their school of origin. Many participants also pointed to the use of social workers as a key strategy in meeting the requirements of MVA. The presence of social workers assisted in building relationships with the families, while relationships with school staff assisted in supporting students. Participants also identified community partnerships and community support as
vital to their work, as those partnerships helped meet needs the district would otherwise struggle to meet.

**Recommendations**

After completing this research, some key recommendations arose. These recommendations are targeted at improving the implementation of MVA within Missouri. It should be noted that there are additional recommendations that could be made when considering the policy itself, but these recommendations are largely aligned with and focused on work that can be done by school district leaders and homeless liaisons to strengthen the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The first recommendation connects to what educators already recognize as key to supporting any student: relationships. Throughout the research, it became evident that the presence of strong relationships with the students of a school serves two key purposes from the lens of MVA: identification and support. When school staff know their students, they are much more capable of identifying that factors have potentially changed, and they can identify the reality that the student may now be homeless. This serves as a key part of identification with students who are already part of that school community. Additionally, the presence of relationships helps school staff know how to best support the student and family, while also helping to remove the stigma the student may be feeling as they navigate their homelessness. As a result, it is essential that school personnel know their students individually. The presence of such a relationship will have a crucial impact on if the student does or does not slip through the cracks and ensures the student and their family receive the necessary support. To accomplish this work, district leaders must be explicit in focusing professional learning on the topic of building relationships with all
students. As well, homeless liaisons must ensure staff are aware of students experiencing homelessness so staff can be intentional in identifying needed supports.

The second recommendation is for district leaders to examine their enrollment processes. Many liaisons identified the point of enrollment as a primary method in which they identify someone as homeless. However, some liaisons spoke to the difficulty of this when many districts have transitioned to an all-online enrollment process. While the online enrollment process may provide efficiency, it also might be losing some of the personal touch necessary for an individual to feel comfortable in disclosing their homeless status. Furthermore, some participants disclosed that they regularly encounter individuals who do not complete the forms correctly, contributing to both over- and under-identification. While the recommendation is not to avoid having online enrollment, it is imperative that districts that utilize online enrollment evaluate if there can be improvements made in the process to avoid misidentification.

During interviews, it became evident that homeless liaisons who felt their districts were doing well with MVA implementation had strong community partnerships and community support. These partnerships could be community organizations, the local church, and business support. The presence of this support significantly improved the resources made available to families experiencing homelessness. A recommendation, as a result, is that district leaders take inventory of their current partnerships and identify new partnerships they could explore, while also streamlining the support provided by a multitude of community partners. One interview participant acknowledged that they are not familiar with the community organizations available to help, which clearly limits the resources available for families who are in desperate need of support. Comparatively, one
participant was able to describe in-depth the layers of support available throughout the community; they even shared that they are on the board of many of the organizations they discussed. As a result, it is appropriate to imagine a family experiencing homelessness is going to be far better supported and, hopefully, able to navigate out of homelessness in that community versus the community in which the liaison is unaware of any available community support.

The next recommendation is two-fold: one element of the recommendation can be addressed by districts, while the other element is more of an issue with the policy and needs to be advocated around, potentially by districts. The liaisons who spoke to the presence of social workers in their district were far more confident in the services they were providing and were more able to speak to their proactive support of students and families experiencing homelessness. Conversely, those who did not have social workers had less understanding of how families were being supported, as the support seem to be more targeted around reactive support. As a result, it is recommended that each district employ at least one social worker for the purpose of supporting families identified as homeless. As well, it is recommended that district leaders create a flow chart to identify who is responsible for each layer of supporting these families and students. However, it is recognized that this mandate is without funding, aside from grants, and districts are already faced with budgets that do not allow for many priorities to be funded. As a result, the funding of MVA within Missouri needs to be evaluated by the state legislator and/or researchers. It is expected that almost every district has students who are homeless, yet the funding is not present for this work to be truly prioritized.
Another recommendation centers on the training of both liaisons and staff who work with students and families experiencing homelessness. When examining survey data, only two-thirds of participants said staff received adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. This would seem to contradict the earlier data that the overwhelming majority strongly agreed or agreed that they are sufficiently meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness—if staff is not receiving adequate training in identifying and supporting this student population, how can there be so much confidence that the needs of homeless students are indeed being met? Additionally, there must be an increased evaluation of the professional development for liaisons, especially those who are new to their role. One liaison that was interviewed is in their first year as the homeless liaison for their district. Throughout the interview, they shared frequently that they did not feel equipped to do their role and they were unable to answer most questions. One component of MVA is that all liaisons receive annual training on how to do their role—however, multiple liaisons shared that this training is not adequate. One liaison spoke of training in years past that was of higher quality and much more extensive. They alluded to the reality that they no longer need such extensive training, as they had been in their role for many years. However, they did share that such training should be required for those who are new to the role. After completing all of the interviews, the data would support that recommendation.

Finally, it is essential that each district and the state spend time better understanding the negative impacts of being doubled-up. Throughout interviews, participants would downplay being doubled-up, treating it more like a slight inconvenience than a chaotic housing situation. One participant even shared that they had
little to no communication with families doubled-up, as they do not really need anything. This oversight is negatively impacting the support of families who are reliant on others for their housing and, commonly, are in sleeping arrangements that do not provide the comforts that those who have their own housing experience.

**Conclusion**

In recognition of the growing number of homeless students, it is imperative that states and districts evaluate how they are identifying students who are homeless and, potentially more importantly, how they are supporting those students and their families. Districts must be committed to supporting these students so they can play an important role in helping the student overcome the barriers associated with being homeless. Within this section, administrators and districts have been provided with recommendations that would assist them in going beyond simply being compliant with MVA, better meeting the needs of their students and their families when faced with being homeless.
REFERENCES


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SECTION V: CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

JOURNAL ARTICLE TO BE SUBMITTED TO:

Journal of School Leadership
Abstract

Homelessness continues to be a growing reality for students within the K-12 public school system. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) was in response to this growing reality, focused on ensuring students and families were better supported by public schools when they experienced homelessness. While research does exist on why MVA is needed, the impact it can have, how districts have failed to appropriately comply, and how states have created additional legislation, there is a gap in research pertaining to the implementation of MVA within the state of Missouri. Additionally, there is no state-specific legislation in addition to MVA. As a result, the researcher desired to explore if MVA was being implemented, as designed, within the state of Missouri. Furthermore, the researcher desired to equip district administrators with a better understanding of implementation and tools to increase their implementation of MVA, better supporting students and their families experiencing homelessness. The findings connected to both research questions explored recognize that compliance may not be the primary concern, but that there are opportunities to better meet the needs of students identified as homeless. As a result, strategies have been recommended to ensure districts are more focused on the needs of their homeless population. There are abundant opportunities to continue this important research, but this research serves as a foundation for exploring homelessness within Missouri. Specifically, there is an opportunity to research if the perceptions and realities align with the perceptions of homeless liaisons. As well, there is an opportunity to conduct research that involves a larger population of homeless liaisons, plus their supervisors. There is also an opportunity to research and
evaluate how the state is implementing, supervising, and evaluating the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act within Missouri.

Keywords: Homeless, homelessness, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, tools for implementation, McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Framework, McKinney-Vento implementation fidelity for Missouri
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Introduction

Around 2.5 million children were facing homelessness, while the number continued to grow (Morgan, 2018). As those 2.5 million children are enrolled in school, schools must increase their knowledge of homelessness while also increasing their ability to support students facing such an experience.

Homelessness creates many barriers for those experiencing it, whether adult or child (Clemens et al., 2018). The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, later renamed and now known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (herein referred to as the McKinney-Vento Act, MVA, the Act), was passed in 1987 to guarantee youth experiencing homelessness have a “full and equal opportunity to succeed” (Clemens et al., 2018, p. 106). Since being signed into law in 1987, MVA has been amended multiple times, as represented in Figure 1. In 1990, the law was amended to protect students from having to change their school of enrollment based upon a change in residency due to homelessness. In 1994, families experiencing homelessness were guaranteed access to other educational services, such as Head Start. Then, No Child Left Behind was passed in 2001, amending MVA to require all public-school districts to have a homeless liaison and also requiring districts to provide bussing, or other transportation, to eligible students. Finally, as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, amendments were made to incorporate a focus on post-secondary education (Duffield & Cohen, 2017).

The Act attempts to ensure the barriers created by homelessness can be negated and overcome for youth in regard to academic access and success. Specifically, the Act was designed to ensure homeless youth do not have to change schools as a result of their unstable housing situation. Without the Act, each time a student moved to a different
Figure 1

Changes to McKinney-Vento

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<td>MVA signed into law</td>
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<td>from having to change their school of enrollment based upon a change in residency due to homelessness</td>
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<td>require all public-school districts to have a homeless liaison and also required districts provide bussing, or other transportation, to eligible students</td>
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Note. Adapted from Duffield and Cohen, 2017.

location, they would be required to enroll in the new school of residence, which is tied to the student’s current physical address. However, MVA requires school districts to immediately enroll any student classified as homeless while also ensuring students currently enrolled in a school can stay enrolled there throughout their time while classified as homeless. MVA is a federal act implemented at the state level. Each school district in every state is expected to confirm homeless youth have access to a free, appropriate public education. MVA aims to remove barriers around residency requirements and enrollment; allows homeless children to be part of a mainstreamed school environment; and allows homeless youth access to education and related services necessary to have an opportunity to meet the same academic standards all students are expected to meet (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2015).

An estimated 36,006 public school students experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year in Missouri (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, n.d.). Each public school district in Missouri chooses how to comply with the
expectations of the Act. This implementation requires investigation as there are two key contributing factors at play. First, the ambiguity in how MVA defines homelessness allows districts to have a fairly large amount of discretion. For instance, if a single mom is living with her mother and father, most districts would acknowledge her children should be classified as homeless as they are doubled up since they are residing in someone else’s residence. However, if the single mother has no intention of moving out and has been in the same living situation for years, the classification becomes more complex. This is just one example of the complexities of identifying a child as homeless.

The second key factor is that the Act is implemented with minimal oversight. This lack of accountability calls into question the authenticity of implementation in all public schools throughout the state of Missouri.

Studies continue to show the number of children facing homelessness is increasing, representing a growing number of school-age children that are or should be identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act (Morgan, 2018). Students who are experiencing homelessness face a significant number of barriers (Tobin & Murphy, 2013), requiring educators to be knowledgeable of these barriers and of how to support students through such an experience. The McKinney-Vento Act was written and implemented originally in 1987, with multiple amendments since, most recently in 2015. Over this time, research has further examined and explored the detrimental impact of homelessness on youth. Recognizing the Act has been law for over 30 years, combined with growing knowledge of why MVA is necessary, it is essential to further explore if MVA is being implemented as designed, therefore allowing it to provide the targeted impact of providing stability for youth experiencing homelessness.
This research is targeted at understanding if the Act is being implemented as it was written, using data collected from homeless liaisons within Missouri. The findings of this research will explore that data and will answer the research questions guiding this work. Furthermore, the researcher desires for future research to be conducted to better understand if the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is at the level expected and, more importantly, if it is having the desired impact on students experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the researcher intends to equip school administrators with tools to best support students experiencing homelessness.

Statement of the Problem

As homelessness continues to grow, so will the number of youths who are identified as homeless within K-12 schools. This growth recognizes educators must become increasingly knowledgeable of the challenges of homelessness, as well as how to help support students in such a position. Students experiencing homelessness may have decreased attendance, lower academic performance, and may require additional attention (Shields & Warke, 2010). These factors may incentivize administrators to avoid classifying a student as homeless, therefore requiring the students to transition to a different school based on the child’s new school of residence. It is necessary to evaluate if the McKinney-Vento Act, as written and implemented, provides the desired supports for students experiencing homelessness.

When examining current literature, there appears to be a lack of research conducted surrounding the implementation of McKinney-Vento in Missouri. Recognizing states have the discretion to create their own plans for implementation, it is important to specifically evaluate implementation in Missouri. Contributing to concern is that finding
information regarding MVA on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website is challenging—this may be representative of a lack of expectations around implementation. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) explored a lack of compliance with the McKinney Act in Chicago Public Schools, which led to the creation of state law. The Illinois state law contributed to amending the Stewart B. McKinney Act in 2002 as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. The amendment in 2002 also renamed the McKinney Act to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, with the amendment incorporating many of the components from the Illinois law, the Illinois Education for Homeless Children Act. The research conducted by Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) focused on compliance in the state of Illinois, which could be of benefit in guiding research in the state of Missouri.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to evaluate if the implementation of MVA in Missouri is happening as designed. In 1987, the United States Congress recognized the growing issue of homelessness amongst youth in the United States. To address this issue, Congress acted and passed the Stewart B. McKinney Act. In the 30+ years since the Act, homelessness continues to persist and grow (Morgan, 2018; Pavlakis, 2018; Shields & Warke, 2010). The intent is to evaluate the implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri; such an evaluation will assist in calling for further policy to be designed and implemented at the state level. Understanding the realities of homelessness will allow educators to take a supportive stance rooted in empathy (Clemens et al., 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013).
While the research questions will guide the findings of this study, the current hypothesis is implementation is a concern. One immediate reason for this hypothesis is prior research conducted (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014; Shields & Warke, 2010; Tanabe & Mobley, 2011) highlights implementation issues in other states. Additionally, based on current work in the field, the researcher has experienced implementation concerns. This study provides the opportunity for the implementation of MVA to be strengthened. Increased implementation will better support families, partly due to increased knowledge for the homeless liaisons and other necessary staff.

This study will be carried out utilizing mixed methods, allowing for the data to be understood at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data collection to help explain the quantitative results. A pragmatic parallel mixed methods design will be utilized, in which “qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed to answer a single study’s research questions” (Mertens, 2020, p. 322). The quantitative and qualitative data will be collected concurrently, allowing each to help better answer the research questions.

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

2. In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

These two questions guided the research, focusing primarily on implementing the Act. Without appropriate implementation, it is unrealistic to conduct a proper evaluation
of MVA, calling for an implementation evaluation to be conducted. The following sections explain how such an evaluation was conducted, consistently tying back to these two research questions.

**Literature Review**

**The Reality of Homelessness**

Losinski et al. (2013) defined homelessness as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (p. 92). There are, however, differing beliefs as to what is the appropriate definition of homelessness. Pavlakis (2018) provided a more in-depth definition, leaning upon language from the McKinney-Vento Act, defining homelessness as “including students not only living in public spaces, shelters, and motels or hotels but also those doubling up (sharing housing out of economic necessity) and awaiting foster care placement” (p. 1045). Youth who are doubling up, meaning their family is staying at the home of a friend or relative, represent over 50% of the youth homeless population according to Morgan (2018). In an effort to simplify the complexities of defining homelessness, Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) called for the term residential instability to be used in place of homeless. The variety of definitions utilized helps to represent both the complexity of homelessness, as well as the ongoing discussion about what exactly is homelessness. In this brief start so far, four definitions have already been provided, a small representation of the large variety of definitions seen in the literature regarding homelessness.

The complexities of homelessness do not end with trying to define what homelessness is—it persists when trying to examine the impact of homelessness on youth. Morgan (2018) wrote it was expected around 1 million of the 1.3 million students
classified as homeless would fail to complete high school. This expectation alone is staggering, before considering all of the other impacts of homelessness. As well, families with children now account for 34% of the homeless population, with this percentage continuing to rise (Morgan, 2018; Shields & Warke, 2010). This is a frightening increase considering that during the 1980s, families with children represented less than 1% of the homeless population (Losinski et al., 2013). The combination of these two components creates alarm when considering how many additional youths may not complete high school in the coming years unless this trend is reversed (Miller, 2009). Howland et al. (2017) explained that those who were homeless had significantly poorer scores on the WISC-R Vocabulary than their counterparts who were also under-resourced, but had stable housing. In addition to the decreasing likelihood of academic success homeless youth regularly experience, there is an additional long list of negative impacts due to experiencing homelessness. Miller (2009), Tobin and Murphy (2013), and Morgan (2018) each discussed the food insecurity and malnutrition experienced by many homeless youths. Tobin and Murphy (2013) and Morgan (2018) also explained that having access to clean clothes and personal hygiene items/care is a concern for the homeless youth population. Additionally, the homeless population struggles to access the health services they need, while also experiencing a higher level of health issues, including mental health challenges (Losinski et al., 2013; Miller, 2009; Morgan, 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013;). Miller (2009) examined such mental health challenges, explaining that youth experiencing homelessness are much more likely to experience “physical, physiological, and substance abuse” (p. 223). Furthermore, such mental health challenges further contribute to ongoing instability for youth as they age. Recognizing the
accumulation of the many issues experienced because of homelessness, Tobin and Murphy (2013) also noted that attendance is commonly an issue for homeless students. Such attendance issues could be the result of a variety of factors, such as social isolation, transportation challenges, or increased health issues. The combination of these many challenges culminates in having a negative impact on academic performance (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Morgan, 2018; Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

Recognizing the high number of youths who are experiencing homelessness, it is essential the education staff working with these students better understand the signs of homelessness so the school can begin to support the family and offer necessary resources. This work should be coordinated through the homeless liaison at the school (Clemens et al., 2018) and would assist in removing some of the barriers which are created by the school community for homeless families. Many times, homeless families struggle to appropriately and fairly access education due to shortcomings of the schools they are working with during the enrollment process and while actively enrolled (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Shields & Warke, 2010). In addition to struggling to access the typical education that is to be available to all students, “homeless students often are not allowed to participate in certain school activities because they either cannot pay the required fees, or they are unable to participate in after-school activities because of unique transportation arrangements” (Tanabe & Mobley, 2011, p. 55). As this section has explored, children experiencing homelessness face a significant number of barriers they must try to overcome to regain stability. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) alluded to this reality, stating “many of these problems, such as obtaining food, shelter, and medical attention, are more pressing than others and therefore readily take precedence over other
important, but less imminent, concerns” (p. 51). This depicts the reality regarding barriers homelessness creates, forcing those experiencing it to prioritize needs that many others have present at all times.

**Identifying Homeless Students and Families**

With the recognition of the many barriers present for homeless families, it is crucial school staff be capable of identifying students who are experiencing homelessness, creating an ability to connect families to resources for which they are eligible (Clemens et al., 2018). Exacerbating this issue, though, is that many homeless youths do not share the struggles they are enduring (Morgan, 2018), which reinforces the need for school staff to have an understanding and acceptance of students experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, Morgan (2018) acknowledged the McKinney-Vento Act “fails to provide a considerable number of homeless youth with the services they need” (p. 218) requiring school staff to assist in this area of need. Crane and Livock (2012) stressed that staff must be committed to pursuing individual outcomes over the mindset of ‘what we have always done’, as it allows for staff to ensure supports are appropriate for that specific student/family. Such a focus would allow staff, and schools, to be able to better support families during times of homelessness.

A study conducted by Pavlakis (2018) found parents of students experiencing homelessness wanted their children to be involved at school and that the parents valued education. It is important staff reciprocate this desire regarding students experiencing homelessness by creating a welcoming environment for these families. Shields and Warke (2010) concluded that failing to create such an environment made it impossible to support the families appropriately. Swick and Bailey (2004) recognized that “through
staff development efforts…and promoting a family friendly school culture, the venue for reaching homeless families is strengthened” (p. 211). The literature also asserts staff must ensure positive communication is occurring between the school and family, as this is a commonly missing component (Losinski et al., 2013; Swick & Bailey, 2004). School staff must, then, create strong and positive lines of communication with the families experiencing homelessness so the family and student will feel part of the school community. Tobin and Murphy (2013) communicated such, stating “efforts need to be made to ensure that homeless youngsters become members of the school community, thus replacing social isolation with social connections and support” (p. 16). Ensuring the youth experiencing homelessness does not identify as an outsider or outcast is essential to connecting with the student and making them feel of importance, hopefully overcoming the barriers they are facing (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006).

Education staff must be aware of the law surrounding students experiencing homelessness, allowing for staff to at minimum provide the expectations written into McKinney-Vento. As referenced earlier, the McKinney-Vento Act stipulates school practices and policies surrounding enrollment cannot impede the enrollment of a student experiencing homelessness. Whether or not the student has the appropriate documentation for school enrollment, such as their birth certificate, immunization records, and proof of residency, the child must be enrolled immediately (Losinski et al., 2013). However, as noted by a building principal in a study conducted by Shields and Warke (2010), many buildings fail to comply correctly with this law. These school-created barriers can result in families falling “into a pattern of victimization and depression that can leave them feeling vulnerable, alone, and incapable of navigating the
often elaborate bureaucratic regulations that can be a part of receiving services” (Losinski et al., 2013, p. 95). While there are bureaucratic regulations tied to MVA, it is essential staff know these regulations and help families navigate the regulations versus allowing the regulations to stifle families’ abilities to access resources designed for their situation. In addition, as covered in an earlier section, schools should be dedicated to helping fill the gap of basic needs, such as food, clothing, needed supplies, hygiene items, and health services (Tobin & Murphy, 2013).

**Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness**

Building off the previous section, public schools must be intentional with their work in supporting students and families who are experiencing homelessness. Throughout this section, the best practices for supporting students and their families facing homelessness will be explored. The previous section focused on the importance of identifying homeless students and families, while this section will focus on how to support students experiencing homelessness. Being explored will be the importance of educational staff understanding the realities of homeless, interventions and academics, and how to partner with families and make them part of the conversation in supporting their child(ren).

Duffield (2001) acknowledged that one significant challenge which is impacting the work needed to supporting students experiencing homelessness is a “lack of awareness about homelessness among school personnel and communities” (p. 332). Sulkowski (2016) addressed this reality, communicating that a first step in supporting students experiencing homelessness must center on increasing the awareness of what homeless students are actually facing. To help educators be better able to serve homeless
students, Powers-Costello and Swick (2011) called for ensuring staff understand the dynamics of being homeless. One dynamic that has been misunderstood is that being doubled-up, in which a family is now living at someone else’s residence, is better and has less of an impact on the individuals. However, Pavlakis (2018) explained that being doubled-up did not have less of an impact in the parent interviews conducted. Additionally, educators must engage in reflecting on their own negative beliefs of why they believe individuals are homeless, as their beliefs may be incorrect and contribute negatively to supporting students experiencing homelessness (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2011). These beliefs help to negatively contribute to the stigma of homelessness, a stigma that negatively impacts homeless students (Sulkowski, 2016). There is a need, as a result, for professional development which helps to “educate and sensitize school staff, other families and students, and community agency workers to the needs and rights of homeless children and families” (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006, p. 42). Masten et al. (2015) also called for professional development for educators, focused on the rights of students and also how to promote resilience among students experiencing homelessness.

Students experiencing homelessness need to have educators who are focused on providing them interventions and focused on their academic success, in addition to meeting their basic needs. Sulkowski (2016) communicated that having a caring educator who conveys their concern for the student’s well-being will help to reduce feelings of isolation, abandonment, and hopelessness. Reducing those feelings then contributes to the student being able to navigate school, while being supported in the areas of learning and functional skills. In addition to the importance of having a caring adult, it is imperative
educators assist in connecting students and families experiencing homelessness to services, such as public preschool programs (Duffield, 2001). The ability to be connected to early interventions will help to mitigate achievement gaps that arise later (Masten et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is of importance that educators participate in “outreach to ensure these students participate in routine assessments, prekindergarten screening, and other opportunities for early identification of learning problems and needs” (Masten et al., 2015, p. 324). Participation in these screenings and assessments will assist in making sure students facing homelessness receive necessary interventions and are connected to services they are eligible for in a timely manner. Canfield (2014) recognized the complexities of strategies educators need to know, calling for professional development specific to equipping educators with the skills to collaborate with other providers so they may “improve overall outcomes and reduce broader, non-school specific barriers” (p. 172).

Supporting students experiencing homelessness must include partnering with their families, or the support system they have in place. Swick and Bailey (2004) acknowledged that very often educators do not boost dialogue with the families experiencing homelessness. If educators are to proactively meet the basic needs of these families, as called for by Tobin and Murphy (2013), this ongoing dialogue must be present. Swick and Bailey (2004) also provided five strategies for promoting dialogue with families experiencing homelessness: interagency links; school and district initiatives; teacher and staff observations and initiatives; parent and family requests; and, community initiatives. As well, conducting a meeting with the family in which the educator gathers the needs of the family, while also assessing their strengths and what
resources they already have in place helps to foster a partnership with the family (Swick & Bailey, 2004). Another activity that can build trust with the family is to have them create a self-portrait which will “show their strengths, needs, and potential long-term success” (Swick & Bailey, 2004, p. 212). Crane and Livock (2012) recommended the good practice of explicitly involving the families in identifying needed supports. Taylor Wilkins et al. (2015) also discussed the potential benefit of having homeless liaisons, a position required by MVA, take on an increased role of having contact with families experiencing homelessness.

**Federal, State, and Local Action**

“As a result of increasing levels of economic volatility and family poverty, school-age children account for nearly 40 percent of the total population of homeless people in the United States” (Canfield et al., 2017, p. 53). This 40 percent equates to around 900,000 to 1.4 million school-age children experiencing homelessness at any given time, according to Miller (2009). Such staggering statistics lay the groundwork for why such an issue calls for attention from the federal, state, and local levels. The federal response to the issue since 1987 is the McKinney-Vento Act. However, this federal act has many barriers when it comes to the implementation at the state and local level (Clemens et al., 2018; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Losinski et al. (2013) recognized such barriers and called for strategies to be implemented, which “emphasize the need for interagency collaboration and the development of policies and procedures to eliminate red tape and to enhance efforts to collect data in a meaningful and accurate manner” (p. 95). This section will navigate the need, and presence, of action at the federal, state, and local levels.
**Federal Action**

The research on the need and presence of federal action is tied primarily to the McKinney-Vento Act, which initially began as the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. That Act was the first federal legislation specific to youth experiencing homelessness. This initial Act had two foundational focuses, which have continued to drive ongoing legislation: 1) access to school even if lacking enrollment requirements and, 2) the option for students to stay enrolled in their school of history versus transitioning to their new school of residence (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). Since that initial passage, the Act has been amended and reauthorized multiple times, while also being renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. While the initial Act provided a solid foundation for the rights of students experiencing homelessness, it lacked specificity and made implementation a challenge, which provided a need for future amendments; the 2001 reauthorization specifically targeted strengthening the law (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). These later amendments and the 2001 reauthorization incorporated stronger civil rights and antidiscrimination protections, better supporting youths and families facing homelessness. The 2001 reauthorization also focused on three primary principles: “expanding school choice, mandating immediate school action, and creating supportive infrastructures” (Howland et al., 2017, p. 269).

While there are positives and strengths to the federal action on homelessness via the McKinney-Vento Act, there are also noted shortfalls in the research that continue to negatively impact implementation. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) discussed and reiterated the funding issue with MVA, stating “the Act simply does not provide sufficient funding to implement its mandates” (p. 60). Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) also alluded to
funding concerns, while also presenting that districts may not be prioritizing homelessness in their budget. In the 2015 amendment of MVA, $85 million was appropriated for the fiscal years of 2017-2020, a decrease from the $100 million that was appropriated in the 2008 amendment. While $85 million is a large amount of money, it has to be then distributed to 50 different states, which then are responsible for distributing it to the school districts in their state. In addition to the funding concerns, research has questioned the academic impact of MVA. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) conducted a study in North Carolina, finding that there was not a significant impact on academic achievement for students identified as homeless. They did discuss the positive impact on students, “including transportation, ease of registration, school supplies, and some health issues” (p. 179), but could not identify an academic impact. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) argued that the “fundamental purpose of education is academic” (p. 181), so more research needs to be conducted to evaluate if MVA has had a positive impact on students experiencing homelessness. There is, though, room for argument on if the primary purpose of MVA is academic or if it is to provide stability for the youth, allowing them to stay socially engaged in their school setting.

State Action

The McKinney-Vento Act is the federal legislation which then creates statewide action and accountability. Each state is required to have a state coordinator that oversees the implementation of MVA for their state. Howland et al. (2017) discussed results from a 2006 survey of state coordinators, focusing on the barriers state coordinators identified. In their research, Howland et al. (2017) reported that state coordinators communicated the following barriers to implementation: “(a) the scope of professional responsibilities of
the homeless liaisons; (b) lack of awareness of the law among school personnel; (c) transportation to the school of origin; (d) access to school programs and services; (e) limited community participation…” (p. 274). These barriers identified by state coordinators cause an opportunity to pause and reflect on the implementation of MVA both at the state and local level. Morgan (2018) further drove in the need for such a pause and reflection, stating “the problems associated with failing to provide sufficient services for homeless youth will likely continue unless a different approach is implemented” (p. 220). Some of these concerns may be tied to the concerns surrounding a lack of appropriate funding for the implementation of MVA. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) called for an evaluation of how MVA funds are used and what their impact is on students. Such an evaluation would assist in identifying to what extent funding is an issue and, in addition, best practices in the use of funds appropriated for complying with MVA.

When examining the impact of the McKinney-Vento Act in Missouri, no literature was located. Literature was identified on the implementation of MVA at the state level in other states, though. There is a need for each state to have their own laws that help to strengthen the purpose, and accountability, of the Act. Hendricks and Barkley (2012) provided the context of MVA in Illinois, where the state legislature also created their own state policy to ensure the Act is implemented appropriately, while also providing additional educational rights to youth experiencing homelessness. Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) also explored the Illinois legislation, explaining that such legislation became necessary after multiple court battles in which local school districts were not complying with the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act. The state legislation focused on solidifying the rights provided by the Act. Tanabe and Mobley (2011)
discussed the barriers to implementing MVA in Hawaii, which also culminated in multiple court battles. State-specific legislation helps to strengthen the accountability system that is supposed to be in place, as designed by federal law.

**Local Action**

The 1990 amendment to the Act required that each school district have a local education liaison specific to homelessness. This liaison “has the critical responsibility of ensuring that students enroll in and succeed in school and receive all services for which they are eligible” (Nix-Hodes & Heybach, 2014, p. 147). This individual is crucial to the strong implementation of MVA within their district. To ensure this work can be accomplished, Howland et al. (2017) provided the recommendation that “liaisons be solely designated, and ideally full-time positions, in order to have sufficient time, resources, and professional training to carry out duties indicated by the Act” (p. 274). However, it is essential that all staff are aware of the policies and rights designed for youths experiencing homelessness, as many different staff will work with these families and need to be able to appropriately support them (Canfield et al., 2017). As identified by Hendricks and Barkley (2012), though, MVA lacks clarity on required training for social workers, teachers, counselors, and other relevant school staff. This lacking component negatively impacts the likelihood that staff are regularly meeting the needs of students that are homeless.

As also discussed at the federal and state level, funding continues to be a concern at the local level. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) discussed that districts that have great financial constraints struggle to meet the requirements of the Act. Shields and Warke (2010) emphasized this struggle, too, acknowledging that funding issues contribute to the
difficulty in “developing sustained relationships with these [homeless] families and adequately supporting sustained student learning” (p. 790). A related, but separate struggle, is in providing transportation for students who no longer live within the school boundaries, requiring a bus to be specifically routed for the new address, one which the bus would not typically go to on their route. Providing this transportation is more complicated than it would appear and, as a consequence, is typically not as immediate as demanded by MVA (Howland et al., 2017).

Recognizing that local implementation of MVA is a struggle for districts, while also recognizing the complexities of homelessness, research calls for homelessness to be treated as a community issue instead of just a school issue. To address the impact of homelessness, communities must take a collaborative approach to helping families to overcome the barriers (Howland et al., 2017; Miller, 2009; Tobin & Murphy, 2013). While collaboration is viewed as necessary, Pavlakis (2018) found that “community collaboration was often limited” (p. 1064). To address these issues with community collaboration, districts and community partners must focus on developing effective and efficient lines of open communication, allowing for the issue of homelessness to be combated (Miller, 2009; Swick & Bailey, 2004).

**Framework**

**Process Evaluation Framework**

Framing this study was Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation framework. Process evaluation allowed for the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the state of Missouri to be examined. The primary focus, as evident in the research questions, was to evaluate the level of fidelity present for implementing MVA in Missouri.
According to Rossi et al. (2019), “process evaluation is usually directed at one or both of two key questions: (a) whether a program is reaching the appropriate target population and (b) whether its service delivery and support functions are consistent with the program design specifications…” (p. 93). This study will attempt to answer both of those questions. Additionally, process evaluation is typically built on a foundation of program process theory (Bickman, 1987; Rossi et al., 2019). Part of this strong foundation should be specific, targeted outcomes. The Act provides specific expectations around implementation, which tie to the program process theory; however, it was hypothesized that these expectations were not being implemented with fidelity in Missouri. A lack of administrative standards has the potential to impact implementation. These administrative standards should set specific target achievement for the program (Rossi et al., 2019).

Implementation fidelity, as defined by Rossi et al. (2019), is “the extent to which the program adheres to the program theory and design and usually includes such particulars as the amount of service received by the participants and the quality with which those services are delivered” (p. 98). Assessing implementation fidelity was an essential step to complete prior to conducting an impact evaluation in the future (Rossi et al., 2019; Wholey, 1987). For the purpose of this study, an impact evaluation was not conducted, but the study can contribute to a future impact evaluation. Furthermore, an individual process evaluation was conducted, as opposed to continuous program monitoring.

The process evaluation framework also includes a component referred to as assessing service utilization. The focus of this component is to evaluate if the resource is getting to those it is intended for—this component was addressed via qualitative
interviews with homeless liaisons. In future research, those who receive or should receive services could be participants, but that was not the focus of this study. This framework also describes how to assess organizational functions, such as the delivery system, specification of services, and accessibility. Within this study, evaluating accessibility was accomplished. Accessibility refers to the strategies in place which allow for services to reach the intended population (Rossi et al., 2019).

**Change Logic Model**

A change logic model was utilized within the framework (Helitzer et al., 2010; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Knowlton and Phillips (2013) explained a basic logic model may just consist of strategies and results. The focus begins with what is desired to happen as a result of an action(s). For this research, the model was structured by inputs, throughputs, and outcomes as described by Newcomer et al. (2015). Newcomer et al. (2015) explained that “logic models more comprehensively address the increasing requirements for both outcomes measurement and measurement of how the program is being implemented to allow for improvement” (p. 67). The specific logic model that was utilized for this study appears in Figure 2. In the logic model, the input were the students experiencing homelessness, as their presence is what calls for action. The key throughput for the model was the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as it is designed to support the students, and their families, experiencing homelessness. The primary output, then, was to minimize the impact of homelessness on students. MVA is intended to remove many educational barriers that arise due to a student being homeless. It was important, therefore, to evaluate if MVA was being implemented sufficiently, allowing for the output to be realistically possible.
Helitzer et al. (2010) focused their research on community-based programming; however, the tie to the public policy being evaluated in this research ties well to program evaluation. Helitzer et al. (2010) declared that a logic model helped assess if a process, and its components, had been implemented as planned. McLaughlin and Jordan (1999) also contributed to the research on logic models, noting that once a logic model is created, “critical measurement areas can be identified” (p. 1).

Rossi et al.’s (2019) process evaluation, combined with the change logical model, allowed for an examination of the McKinney-Vento Act and if it was being implemented with fidelity. The change logic model was relevant to this study, as it allowed for an examination of the throughput, which was essential to the intended outcome becoming a reality. Evaluating this throughput through the process evaluation framework allows for future impact evaluations to be conducted.

McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Framework

For the purpose of this study, a framework was created specific to being able to identify a well-implemented McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, at the state level. The purpose of this framework was to identify specific components that should be in place, as a result of the Act. If all of the components are in place, it would be presumed
that the Act is being implemented correctly and is having the desired impact, producing
the expected outcomes. Each of the five components were constructed from the language
and expectations of the current McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. To identify
these components, the expectations of the Act were identified and then categorized. The
categories emerged from the purpose of the individual expectations present in the Act.
Throughout this section, the framework used to identify the components expected to be in
place will be explored. The components of the framework are Educational Opportunities,
Enrollment, Identification and Needs of Children/Youths, Professional Development for
Staff, and Rights.

The first component of the framework for evaluating if MVA is being
implemented well within a state is Educational Opportunities. Within this component,
there are four subsections that must be in place for this component to be evaluated as in
place. The first subsection is that homeless youths must have the opportunities to meet
academic standards that other non-homeless peers are expected to meet. The second
subsection is that homeless youths must have access to public, free preschool programs,
i.e. Head Start. The third subsection requires homeless youths not face barriers to
accessing academic and extracurricular activities. This subsection has to do specifically
with the access to activities that may happen outside of the normal school day, such as
sports or a club. The fourth and final subsection of this component requires the local
education agency (LEA) liaison to ensure parents/guardians of homeless children are
informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children.
Additionally, this subsection requires parents/guardians also be afforded meaningful
opportunities to participate in their child’s education.
The second of the five components for evaluating the implementation of MVA at the state level is Enrollment. There are six key areas that comprise the expectations within enrolling a student who qualifies as homeless. The first area is that LEAs should have policies in place which remove barriers to the identification of homeless youths and also the enrollment and retention of homeless youths. As well, these policies should remove barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, as well as absences. The second expectation within this component is the choice regarding placement of the youth, which shall be made regardless of whether the child lives with the homeless parents or has been temporarily placed elsewhere. The next area is a significant part of this component and, noticeably, the entire act. It requires enrollment never be delayed for a youth experiencing homelessness as a result of issues with: immunization records; residency requirements; birth certificates, school records, or other documentation; guardianship issues; uniform or dress code requirements. The fourth area within the component is that the enrolling school must immediately contact the last school of attendance to request relevant academic and other records. Within the next area is a requirement for how to handle when a homeless youth completes the final grade level served at their school of origin. When a homeless youth completes the final grade level at that school, the student must be allowed to attend the receiving school of the feeder school, similar to their peers. The sixth and final look for within this component necessitates a homeless youth be immediately enrolled at the school where enrollment is sought in the event that a dispute arises regarding the child’s eligibility to be classified as homeless. As well, this must be followed if there is a dispute surrounding which school the child is able to attend.
The third component within this framework centers on the identification and needs of homeless youths. This component has four requirements in regards to the implementation of MVA at the state level. First, each state must have a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths. They are responsible for monitoring LEAs to ensure they are compliant with the Act. The second requirement is LEAs must designate an appropriate staff member who can carry out the duties described in the Act. That individual will be the liaison for the LEA, serving homeless children and youths. The third area of this component requires LEAs to adopt policies and practices which ensure transportation is provided for homeless youths, both to and from the school of origin. The fourth and final area insists state coordinators and LEAs inform stakeholders of the duties of the LEA liaisons, while also publishing annually an updated list of all LEA liaisons within the state on the state educational agency’s website.

The framework also has the fourth component which requires professional development for the staff of the LEA. The first requirement is the LEA liaison ensures school personnel providing services to homeless youths participate in professional development and other support opportunities. The second area requires the LEA to ensure their liaison receives professional development for their role as a liaison. The final requirement is each state’s Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths provide professional development opportunities to the LEAs throughout the state.

The fifth and final component of the framework, Rights, is the lengthiest. This component has some areas which overlap with other components, as the focus in this area is on the rights of the homeless youth and their parents/guardians, whereas the other components are presented more from the perspective of the state or LEA. This overlap
contributes to this component being the longest, with 10 parts, but each of these parts is necessary for evaluating the overall component. The 10 parts that encompass the rights of homeless youths and their parents/guardians are:

1. The LEA liaison must ensure public notice of the educational rights of homeless children is disseminated in locations frequented by parents/guardians of homeless youths.

2. LEAs will continue the child’s education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness, including the remainder of the current academic year.

3. LEAs should presume keeping the child in the school of origin is always in the child’s best interest, except when doing so goes against the request of the child’s parent or guardian.

4. Students who are homeless must be integrated into the mainstream setting, not segregated to a different school or program within a school for homeless youths.

5. If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment, the parent/guardian must be provided with written explanations of all decisions related to school selection or enrollment.

6. If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment, the parents/guardians should be referred to the LEA liaison; the liaison shall carry out the dispute resolution as quickly as possible.

7. The LEA liaison must ensure parents/guardians are fully informed of all transportation services.
8. Each homeless child must be provided services comparable to services offered to other students in the school, including: transportation services; educational services for which the child is eligible, such as services under Title I, educational programs for children with disabilities or English learners; programs in career and technical education; programs for gifted and talented students; and, school nutrition programs.

9. If the child needs to obtain immunizations, or other required health records, the enrolling school must immediately refer the parent/guardian to the LEA liaison. The LEA liaison will then assist in obtaining necessary immunizations or screenings.

10. Each state will have a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths. They will respond to inquiries from parents/guardians of homeless children to ensure each child or youth subject to an inquiry is receiving the full protections and services provided by the Act.

**Design of the Study**

This research utilized a pragmatic parallel mixed methods design, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative work (Mertens, 2020). This design was utilized as both qualitative and quantitative data were collected sequentially, with minimal lag time in between (Mertens, 2020). These data were integrated to contribute to the findings, implications, and discussion components of the study. This section will further describe the design of this study, focusing on setting, participants, data collection, and data analysis.
Setting

The setting for the research was all 518 K-8 and K-12 public school districts within the state of Missouri. Access to each district was sought via their identified homeless liaison. Specific districts were highlighted through the qualitative portion of the research. Districts were selected based on liaisons identifying they were willing to participate in an interview on the survey distributed to all liaisons. Districts were categorized using the definitions as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). At the time of research, DESE tracked this classification using the previous metro-centric locale codes, which are: Large City, Mid-size City, Urban Fringe of a Large City, Urban Fringe of a Mid-size City, Large Town, Small Town, Rural (Outside MSA), and Rural (Inside MSA). For the purpose of this research, the eight NCES categories were reduced to four categories: City, Suburb, Town, Rural. When examining the 518 districts, their distribution amongst the four categories were: 12 were City, 73 were Suburb, 58 were Town, 375 were Rural. Three districts were selected from each of these four classifications. Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was utilized to select specific participants from each of those four groupings, dependent on those that responded to the survey that they were willing to participate in interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated researchers should use purposeful sampling to obtain specific components from their participants, to discover, gain insight, and become better informed during the research process.

Participants

For the research, the researcher invited all 518 Missouri public school homeless liaisons and their supervisors to participate. On the Missouri Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education website, a list identified the homeless liaison for each district. To invite participants, the researcher sent an email to all liaisons. Within the email sent to liaisons, the researcher asked them to share the survey with their supervisor. The target was to have a minimum of 100 liaisons complete the survey, with an additional target of at least 50 supervisors completing the survey. It was anticipated there were 518 supervisors, matching the number of liaisons. Those individuals were recruited via email. If all 518 liaisons, along with the 518 supervisors, responded they would all have been included in the data analysis and findings portion specific to the survey. Within the survey, there was a question that asked the participant to identify if they were the liaison or the supervisor of the liaison. Within the survey, the participant selected if they identified their district as being urban, suburban, or rural. The researcher then conducted interviews with liaisons that indicated such willingness on their survey. They were selected using random sampling (Fink, 2017). To aid in the random selection of those 12 districts, they were first separated into the four separate categories. Then, a random name selector website was utilized to select the three districts from each of the four categories. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. All participants remained anonymous.

**Data Collection**

To collect data, a mixed methods survey (Appendix A) was emailed to potential participants. Within the survey was the informed consent. Qualtrics was utilized for survey creation, data collection, and descriptive statistics. Within the survey were quantitative questions utilizing a Likert rating scale, as well as open-ended qualitative questions. The questions were written in a way to help evaluate the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the state of Missouri. The survey data allowed for an analysis of
how liaisons and their supervisors feel MVA is being implemented in their districts and
the state of Missouri. As well, they were able to provide perspective on potential barriers
that may be in place if implementation is lacking. The use of a survey increased the
number of homeless liaisons and supervisors that will be able to participate in the study.

Additionally, to acquire the qualitative data, interviews were held with 11 total
participants. All of the interviews were recorded for the purpose of creating a transcript
of the interview. After the interview, each transcript was downloaded for later analysis.
The researcher conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews via Zoom, using an
interview protocol. Semi-structured interviewing is a medium between structured and
unstructured interviewing, in which there is a balance of more and less structured
questions. The questions, then, are used flexibly, and the central part of the interview is
dedicated to topics the researcher anticipates will be explored (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Qualitative interviewing was utilized because, as stated by Seidman (2019), it is a “basic
mode of inquiry” (p. 8). The interview protocol (Appendix B) was created to help in
assessing the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. The researcher intended to
conduct interviews with three liaisons from each of the four categories of city, suburb,
town, and rural; however, there were only two participants who agreed to be interviewed
from the city category. The other data collection took place using the websites of twelve
randomly selected school districts. This collection was guided by the use of an artifact
analysis protocol tool (Appendix C). These districts will be selected at random using a
random number picker via Google. Three districts were selected from each of the four
categories. The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate if school districts were providing
information to families surrounding MVA. This analysis helped to support if school
districts were clearly communicating the rights provided to families experiencing homelessness, as provided by MVA.

**Data Analysis**

Twelve school districts were selected randomly, using a stratified random sample in which districts were first categorized prior to selection, for an analysis of what was present on their websites relevant to MVA/homelessness. An analysis protocol tool (Artifact C) was utilized to guide this work. To also aid in credibility and creating an audit trail, a screenshot was taken of the websites analyzed. The protocol examined what information was accessible on the website, including: the liaison’s name and contact information, an overview of the McKinney-Vento Act, protections/accommodations available to students protected by MVA, resources that can be provided to support families experiencing homelessness. For the 12 districts, there were three from each of the four classifications. A document analysis was also conducted on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, using the same protocol used on the 12 districts. The purpose of this analysis was to identify how well the state clarifies what MVA provides for families experiencing homelessness.

Descriptive statistics for quantitative surveys, as described by Fink (2017) and Mertens (2020), were utilized. The focus of these descriptive statistics was on the frequencies and percentages of the data. Fink (2017) explained that descriptive statistics allow for a basic description of both the sample and responses while also allowing for charts to be created that explain what the data communicated. Mertens (2020) captured descriptive statistics as “summarizing data on a single variable” (p. 443). The focus of
these descriptive statistics will be to communicate the responses on the Likert scales present in the survey.

For the qualitative components of the research, qualitative coding and qualitative data analysis, as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), were employed. The interviews were recorded, allowing for a transcript of each interview to be created. To analyze the transcripts, excerpts from the interviews were categorized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2019). After categorizing excerpts for each interview, emergent themes surfaced and were named. Following the initial coding, the emergent themes were reduced to an appropriate number of consolidated categories. This data then contributed significantly to the findings section of the study.

**Limitations**

The first limitation noted is the level of participation. In the state of Missouri, there are 518 K-8 and K-12 public school districts, yet there were only 103 participants and some of these participants may have been from the same district. This number was short of the target in the design of the study, which aspired for 100 liaisons and 50 supervisors to participate in the study; instead, the study had 89 liaisons and 14 supervisors. While the survey was sent to each identified liaison, it was optional if they completed the survey. For a variety of reasons, liaisons may have chosen to not participate. Increased participation would have contributed to a greater level of reliability in what was reported. As well, some liaisons that chose not to participate may have chosen so due to lacking confidence in the practices they employ in implementing MVA within their district; if this possibility is accurate, it would inflate the data reported. It is impossible to know if the 103 participants present accurately represent the 518 districts.
For instance, having a higher participation level among those that identified as urban could shift the data, as they likely have a larger number of students experiencing homelessness. For the survey, only four districts identified as urban. This is also based on their identification, not using the NCES codes since the survey was anonymous. The use of the NCES codes, which identified interview participants as City, Suburb, Town, or Rural was targeted at presenting findings by category; however, this was limited by only having two City participants and by the findings not being significantly different by group, although there were some findings that will be explored which do differ based on NCES category.

Another limitation of this research is the target audience. While building principals have been identified as the audience, this audience may not have the full ability to improve the implementation of MVA within their district. Realistically, this research would also target school board members, superintendents, and other district leadership, in addition to building principals. To access this audience for the state of Missouri, the researcher would need to present to the members of the Missouri Council of School Administrators (MCSA). MCSA, however, does not hold an annual conference, limiting the ability to target them. As well, there is some need to advocate to the state legislature surrounding the concerns of funding and to explore the potential need for state-specific legislation, however that audience is not being targeted for this research.

A final limitation that needs to be noted is the groups represented by participants. All of the participants work for a K-8 or K-12 public school district, self-reporting their level of implementation. This leaves plenty of room for over-confidence in their implementation. To strengthen this, interviewing and surveying families of the same
districts would help to identify places of agreement in implementation and gaps in which the parties identify the strengths and weaknesses of implementation. As well, including the state coordinator for implementing MVA in Missouri would provide yet another perspective for the implementation of MVA in Missouri.

Findings

This section will explore the findings identified after analyzing data collected via a survey, interviews, and an artifact analysis. In total, there were 103 participants in the survey. Of the 103 participants, 89 of them identified as the homeless liaison for their district. As well, 97 of the participants had a master's degree or higher. Survey participants were also asked to self-identify if they identified their district as being urban, suburban, or rural—83 of the participants identified their district as rural. It is important to note that this question relied on the participants self-identifying not connecting to the NCES codes previously explained, as the participants were anonymous and the researcher could not ensure all participants would know their district's NCES classification. Of the 103 participants, 96 identified their district enrollment as being less than 10,000. The full demographic data for each of the 103 participants, and their school districts, can be found in Table 1.

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to understand to what extent MVA is being implemented throughout Missouri, primarily utilizing a quantitative lens. When participants were questioned as to how well their district implements MVA, 76.6% strongly agreed or agreed that they are implementing MVA well, with a total of 93.6% responding favorably, as seen in Table 2. When interviewing participants, six of the 11
Table 1

*Demographics of the Participants and their School Districts*

| Which of the following best applies to you? (N=103) |
|---|---|
| The supervisor of the liaison for homeless student services | The liaison for homeless student services |
| 13.59% (14) | 86.41% (89) |

| What is your highest degree obtained? (N=103) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bachelor | Master | Specialist | Doctorate | Other |
| 1.94% (2) | 29.13% (30) | 37.86% (39) | 27.18% (28) | 3.88% (4) |

| Would you identify your district as urban, suburban, or rural? (N=103) |
|---|---|---|
| Urban | Suburban | Rural |
| 3.88% (4) | 15.53% (16) | 80.58% (83) |

| What is the total enrollment of your district? (N=103) |
|---|---|---|
| 0-2,999 student | 0-2,999 student | 10,000 students or more |
| 81.55% (84) | 11.65% (12) | 6.80% (7) |

participants stated that their district is doing a good, or better, job of meeting the requirements of MVA.

Building off the previous item, participants were then asked if they sufficiently meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Participants scored themselves better within this component: 96.8% responded favorably overall, with 87.2% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they meet the needs of their students experiencing homelessness. These data are contradicted by some of the interview participants, though.
Table 2

**Likert Survey Responses for Research Question 1**

Our district implements the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act well. \((N=94)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.06% (1)</td>
<td>1.06% (1)</td>
<td>4.26% (4)</td>
<td>17.02% (16)</td>
<td>53.19% (50)</td>
<td>23.40% (22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our district sufficiently meets the needs of students experiencing homelessness. \((N=94)\)

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<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
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Our staff receives adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. \((N=94)\)

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<th>Disagree</th>
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As a homeless liaison, or a supervisor of a homeless liaison, I have received adequate training in how to oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. \((N=79)\)

<table>
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Some of the participants acknowledged that meeting the compliance requirements of MVA does not always mean they are utilizing the best practices in supporting families and students experiencing homelessness. Four of the 11 interview participants specifically discussed or connected to this feeling, where one interview participant scored
themselves as getting a 75% in meeting the requirements of MVA, but only a 50-60% in meeting the needs of the people they are supporting.

The next two Likert-scale responses within the survey centered on training: the first item evaluated the training staff received regarding how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness, while the second item evaluated the training the liaison, or supervisor, has received in how to oversee the implementation of MVA within their district. As seen in Table 2, 68.1% of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed the staff within their district received adequate training pertaining to identifying and supporting students who are homeless. Overall, 89.4% responded favorably, which included slightly agreeing with the statement. An interview participant conveyed they see this as a key responsibility of their job, as they must ensure they are helping staff to understand what to watch for in identifying students that may be experiencing homelessness. This data aligns closely with the question regarding if liaisons and supervisors felt they had received adequate training in overseeing the implementation of MVA, as 64.5% of the survey participants strongly agreed or agreed they had, with 84.8% responding favorably overall. Multiple interview participants, though, discussed a need for more training and support, including a desire for in-person training. One participant noted that it may be useful for districts to be connected to a mentor district, as some districts do not regularly experience students being identified as homeless leaving them less equipped to meet the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness.

The artifact analysis data align with implying some districts are not being as impacted by homelessness due to a complete absence of any information for a family
experiencing homelessness. Of the six rural or town districts analyzed, only one listed their homeless liaison on their website, with all six not having any information about student homelessness. Comparatively, four of the six suburb or city districts listed their homeless liaison, with all four also including additional information regarding student homelessness.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question for the study was “In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?” This research question was analyzed from a predominantly qualitative lens, focusing on what the participants of the survey and interview said regarding the ways they implemented MVA within their district. The themes which emerged while analyzing survey and interview responses were access to necessary resources, stability, and relationships/connections.

**Provide Access to Resources**

The strongest theme that emerged was the need to provide access to resources that may be considered basic or essential needs. Within the survey, participants were asked to share the services available to their students experiencing homelessness. A key service identified was having access to transportation, identified by 31 survey participants and 7 interview participants. Both survey and interview participants described providing access to food and clothing, through a variety of avenues—three participants specifically mentioned on-site clothing resources as a vital resource for students. One interview participant identified that if they did not have the community supporting their clothing closets, spread throughout their school buildings, they would not be able to meet this need on their own. Other participants shared that they do support the food needs of their
students experiencing homelessness via a food bag program in which food goes home with the student each weekend; they also shared that this program is not just for students experiencing homelessness, but for any student that has a food need. Of the survey participants, 14 participants also discussed the need for students to have access to counseling services due to their circumstances. Only 15 survey participants discussed the need for academic supports, which is a required component of MVA and reflected in the framework for evaluating MVA implementation, which was explained previously.

Provide Stability

The next most dominant theme that emerged with interview participants was the overarching need to provide stability for these students, recognizing that their home lives are in a state of chaos. Each interview participant also discussed the need to ensure immediate enrollment was present for these students and their families. To accomplish this work, nine of the 11 interview participants described their district social workers as being crucial, while the other two interview participants explained they did not have social workers and instead relied on building school counselors. Additionally, seven survey participants specifically mentioned the use of district social workers. However, there may be a lack of understanding of how being doubled-up negatively impacts a student and their family. In two interviews, participants spoke of being doubled-up as lesser of a challenge and that, as a result, the liaisons did not need to check in with these families like they do their other families. However, the Act recognizes doubled-up as a type of homelessness, also creating instability for the student and their family.
Develop Relationships

The next most common theme, the importance and value of relationships and personal connection, emerged when examining how liaisons and districts make families aware of the services available to them if they are experiencing homelessness. The primary way survey participants identified they made families aware of services available to them was by making personal contact, following the family being identified; some of the provided resources came from the district, while others relied on a referral to a community agency. Of the survey participants, 46 participants specifically mentioned making personal contact, also discussing the use of their district websites, pamphlets and fliers, and relying on their community partnerships to increase awareness. While 15 survey participants identified the use of their district websites as a tool in making families aware of available resources, only 3 of the 12 district websites analyzed during the artifact analysis had any information about resources for families experiencing homelessness; those three districts were coded as suburb or city.

Promptly and Accurately Identify

Another component analyzed was how districts identified students experiencing homelessness, as the implementation of MVA relies on accurate and prompt identification. When surveyed, 53 participants communicated that a key element of their identification process occurs during enrollment. However, when identifying students who are currently enrolled, but have become homeless, the identification process varied. Some participants discussed they rely on teacher and counselor observation, while others discussed word of mouth as a way they become aware of families who may now be experiencing homelessness. Many districts identified identification as a key area in which
they have improved, while also acknowledging identification can be the most challenging aspect. One participant acknowledged this challenge and provided how they approach it, stating:

This is a team effort. Everyone in the district is trained to recognize signs of possible homelessness and they refer. We have identifying questions in the student enrollment fields that families fill out annually; intake staff are trained to ask probing questions when needed and refer a family directly during enrollment; families can refer others; students and families can self-refer; and this year we are trying to cross-reference duplicate addresses for different families (looking for doubled up) that don't self-disclose.

**Communicate with Families**

The next component focused on how liaisons and districts communicate with families identified as homeless. Once again, the importance and value of relationships and connections emerged. Within the survey, 34 responses referred to the use of phone calls, texting, and emailing. In addition, respondents referred to the use of face-to-face meetings and communication, both during the identification process and in the ongoing support of the family. Four survey participants and three interview participants identified they utilize home visits as a communication method with their families experiencing homelessness. When interviewing the city and suburb participants, all five identified they had social workers, which served as a vital way in which they communicate with and support their families identified as homeless. One interview participant, though, acknowledged some of their agenda in staying in contact with these families was so they can ensure no one is staying identified as homeless when they really are not, as some
families lie to them, stating that those families are “committing educational larceny”. As well, another interview participant stated they do not have much communication with their homeless families, as they are all doubled-up and “do not need much”.

**Focus on the Homeless Student**

The final component examined what participants felt were the pillars of MVA. Participants were asked, “What do you view to be the pillars of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?” Of all the participants, 67 responded to this question. Their responses were then put into a WordCloud, narrowing the responses down to themes that were shared three or more times. The most frequent themes were students, access, and support. Each of these themes focuses more on the individual experiencing homelessness versus just focusing on being compliant with MVA. The WordCloud can be further explored in Figure 1.

**Summary of Findings**

When examining the findings, data were collected from a survey taken by 103 participants, interviews conducted with 11 participants, and by conducting 12 artifact analyses. Emerging from the qualitative data were the themes of access to needed resources, stability, and the importance and value of relationships and connections. The quantitative data, which largely was tied to the survey, attempted to answer the first research question regarding the extent of implementation of MVA in the state of Missouri. The qualitative data attempted to answer the second research question, which examined the ways MVA was being implemented in Missouri. All of the data acquired via a mixed methods approach helped best explore the research questions and provide the foundation for providing recommendations tied to this study.
When answering research question one, which focused on MVA implementation, the study determined districts are compliant with the requirements of the Act. Almost all participants answered favorably that their district was implementing MVA well. However, less than two-thirds of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had received adequate training—not exemplary training, but adequate. This reality points to the likelihood that districts are compliant with the requirements of MVA, but are not exceeding the expectations and have areas of improvement that would better support their students experiencing homelessness. After conducting all interviews, the qualitative data would support this stance, as some participants spoke to practices in place that clearly exceeded the Act, also exceeding the work some other districts were doing within the area of supporting students and families experiencing homelessness. As well, almost three-fourths of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that district staff received
adequate training. This need for improved training may also improve school staff in understanding the impact of being doubled-up, as some participants identified being doubled-up as a minimal impact not requiring as much support.

The second research question, which explored the ways MVA was being implemented, was answered throughout the different findings of the survey. Specifically, it was identified that a key element of implementation focuses on identification and enrollment processes. While survey participants identified identification as a much-improved strength, interview participants pointed to some challenges of their districts utilizing online enrollment, as enrollment is a primary time in which identification occurred. As well, participants identified the importance of immediate enrollment for students experiencing homelessness, assisting in providing stability for that student population. Another key area that participants pointed to as important was providing transportation to students experiencing homelessness. Transportation assisted in removing a barrier that may have kept students from being able to stay at their school of origin. Many participants also pointed to the use of social workers as a key strategy in meeting the requirements of MVA. The presence of social workers assisted in building relationships with the families, while relationships with school staff assisted in supporting students. Participants also identified community partnerships and community support as vital to their work, as those partnerships helped meet needs the district would otherwise struggle to meet.

Discussion

The perspectives of participants, whether via the survey or interviews, were crucial in understanding how the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was being
implemented in Missouri. These perspectives assisted in answering the research questions of the study, and there were connections between what participants shared and what can be found in the literature surrounding students experiencing homelessness. Some of the information collected from participants affirmed or built upon information explored when the literature was reviewed, while other information contradicted the literature.

Literature explained being doubled-up as being just as impactful as the other types of homelessness (Pavlakis, 2018). Interestingly, during interviews, multiple participants explained they did not spend much time with their doubled-up families, as they required less support. This perspective contradicted the literature but may be aligned to not understanding the realities of those families and may instead be an incorrect viewpoint. It is important for district leaders and staff to better understand the negative impacts of being doubled-up, recognizing over 50% of the homeless youth population was classified as doubled-up (Morgan, 2018).

As explored earlier, liaisons recognized the need to communicate with their families. The liaisons who spoke to this were more confident in their support of homeless families. Many liaisons described having social workers as crucial to them being able to support families well. Using social workers to own the work of communicating with families allowed positive communication to be present. Literature recommended positive communication with families be prioritized (Losinski et al., 2013; Swick & Bailey, 2004). As a result of the alignment between the study and literature, social workers being part of the district staff has been recommended in a following section. However, the presence of social workers within a school district has an impact on the budget, connected to concerns with funding. Shields and Warke (2010) recognized that a lack of
funding present in MVA impacted school districts in being able to best support families experiencing homelessness. This lack of funding forces districts to make compromises, such as not having social workers, that may not allow them to support families experiencing homelessness as well as they could if funding was less of an issue.

Additionally, for students and families to best be supported, the support they receive needs to be individualized (Crane & Livock, 2012). Some districts are clearly addressing this by adding social workers to their staff. These social workers were an integral part of supporting students and families experiencing homelessness. Also, when districts shared about their use of community partnerships and support, they were speaking to the recognition of needing a multitude of solutions as the problems faced by those who were homeless is not consistent.

None of this work can be as impactful as desired if there is not consistent, high-quality professional development. Staff must be able to understand what homeless students and families are facing so they can best support those individuals (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). However, simply understanding what the homeless are facing is not enough; staff must then learn how to help those students overcome the barriers they are facing (Masten et al., 2015). This study calls for a focus on improving professional development for both educators and homeless liaisons so that students and families experiencing homelessness can be better supported.

**Implications for Practice**

After completing this research, some key implications for practice are clear. These implications and recommendations are targeted at improving the implementation of MVA within Missouri. It should be noted that there are additional recommendations
that could be made when considering the policy itself, but the implications explored are largely aligned with and focused on work that can be done by school district leaders and homeless liaisons to strengthen the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

The first implication confirms what educators already recognize as key to supporting any student: relationships. Tobin and Murphy (2013) recognized the need for relationships, as they assist in trading social isolation for social connection and support. Throughout the research, it became evident that the presence of strong relationships with the students of a school serves two key purposes from the lens of MVA: identification and support. When school staff know their students, they are much more capable of identifying that factors have potentially changed, and they can identify the reality that the student may now be homeless. This serves as a key part of identification with students who are already part of that school community. Additionally, the presence of relationships helps school staff know how to best support the student and family, while also helping to remove the stigma the student may be feeling as they navigate their homelessness. As a result, it is essential that school personnel know their students individually. The presence of such a relationship will have a crucial impact on if the student does or does not slip through the cracks and in ensuring the student and their family receive necessary supports. To accomplish this work, district leaders must be explicit in focusing professional learning on the topic of building relationships with all students. Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) called for liaisons to ensure they both educated staff on the impact of homelessness, while also sensitizing them to the realities of their homeless students. As well, homeless liaisons must ensure staff are
aware of students experiencing homelessness so that staff can be intentional in identifying needed supports.

The second implication is that district leaders must examine their enrollment processes. Losinski et al. (2013) evaluated the variety of enrollment barriers experienced by families enrolling their students, an issue that must be clearly addressed. Many liaisons identified the point of enrollment as a primary method in which they identify someone as homeless. However, some liaisons spoke to the difficulty of this when many districts have transitioned to an all-online enrollment process. While the online enrollment process may provide efficiency, it also might be losing some of the personal touch necessary for an individual to feel comfortable in disclosing their homeless status. Furthermore, some participants disclosed that they regularly encounter individuals who do not complete the forms correctly, contributing to both over- and under-identification. This implication aligns with the recommendation of Clemens et al. when they stated, “the ability to efficiently identify youth is an essential component for establishing effective educational supports” (p. 110, 2018). While the recommendation is not to avoid having online enrollment, it is imperative that districts that utilize online enrollment evaluate if there can be improvements made in the process to avoid misidentification.

During interviews, it became evident that homeless liaisons who felt their districts were doing well with MVA implementation had strong community partnerships and community support. These partnerships could be community organizations, the local church, and business support. The presence of this support significantly improved the resources made available to families experiencing homelessness. A recommendation, as a result, is that district leaders take inventory of their current partnerships and identify new
partnerships they could explore, while also streamlining the support provided by a multitude of community partners. This work will allow districts to create strong interagency links, a key strategy for reaching homeless families (Swick & Bailey, 2004). One interview participant acknowledged that they are not familiar with the community organizations available to help, which clearly limits the resources available for families who are in desperate need of support. Comparatively, one participant was able to describe in-depth the layers of support available throughout the community; they even shared that they are on the board of many of the organizations they discussed. As a result, it is appropriate to imagine a family experiencing homelessness is going to be far better supported and, hopefully, able to navigate out of homelessness in that community versus the community in which the liaison is unaware of any available community support.

The next implication is two-fold: one element of the implication can be addressed by districts, while the other element is more of an issue with the policy and needs to be advocated around, potentially by districts. The liaisons who spoke to the presence of social workers in their district were far more confident in the services they were providing and were more able to speak to their proactive support of students and families experiencing homelessness. Conversely, those who did not have social workers had less understanding of how families were being supported, as the support seemed to be more targeted around reactive support. As a result, each district should employ at least one social worker for the purpose of supporting families identified as homeless. As well, it is recommended that district leaders create a flow chart to identify who is responsible for each layer of supporting these families and students. However, it is recognized that this mandate is without funding, aside from grants, and districts are already faced with
budgets that do not allow for many priorities to be funded. Tanabe and Mobley (2011) said it succinctly, stating “The Act simply does not provide sufficient funding to implement its mandates” (p. 60). As a result, the funding of MVA within Missouri needs to be evaluated by the state legislator and/or researchers. It is expected that almost every district has students who are homeless, yet the funding is not present for this work to be truly prioritized.

Another implication centers on the training of both liaisons and staff who work with students and families experiencing homelessness. As acknowledged by Tobin and Murphy (2013), schools and their staff play a vital role in helping their homeless students experience stability; to do this well, though, staff must be well-trained in identifying and supporting homeless students. When examining survey data, only two-thirds of participants said staff received adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. This would seem to contradict the earlier data that the overwhelming majority strongly agreed or agreed that they are sufficiently meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness—if staff is not receiving adequate training in identifying and supporting this student population, how can there be so much confidence that the needs of homeless students are indeed being met? Additionally, there must be an increased evaluation of the professional development for liaisons, especially those who are new to their role. One liaison that was interviewed is in their first year as the homeless liaison for their district. Throughout the interview, they shared frequently that they did not feel equipped to do their role and they were unable to answer most questions. One component of MVA is that all liaisons receive annual training on how to do their role—however, multiple liaisons shared that this training is not adequate. One
liaison spoke of training in years past that was of higher quality and much more extensive. They alluded to the reality that they no longer need such extensive training, as they had been in their role for many years. However, they did share that such training should be required for those who are new to the role. After completing all of the interviews, the data would support that recommendation.

Finally, it is essential that each district, and the state, spend time better understanding the negative impacts of being doubled-up. Throughout interviews, participants would downplay being doubled-up, treating it more like a slight inconvenience than a chaotic housing situation. One participant even shared that they had little to no communication with families doubled-up, as they do not really need anything. However, after conducting parent interviews, Pavlakis (2018) concluded that a family being doubled-up was no more stable or better off than families classified as homeless for other reasons. This oversight is negatively impacting the support of families who are reliant on others for their housing and, commonly, are in sleeping arrangements that do not provide the comforts that those who have their own housing experience.

**Directions for Future Research**

There are many areas that could be further researched when evaluating the impact of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, specifically in the state of Missouri. Conducting future research that addresses some of the limitations previously explored would be recommended. A primary recommendation for future research is to replicate the foundation of this study but to include families and students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, it would be impactful to ensure families and students are included from the same districts in which liaisons have participated. This would allow for a more complex
understanding of how MVA is being implemented within a district from multiple perspectives. Further contributing to this impact would be an increase in participants. The current study involves around 20% of the public school districts within Missouri. It would be beneficial to increase participation and to ensure the demographics of participants, in regards to NCES classification, is representative of the state.

Another key area worthy of future research is to evaluate the academic impact of MVA, specifically in the state of Missouri. There was limited literature identified that explored academic impact and this study also did not explore that topic. However, with many participants noting a key focus for them was to provide stability, it is of importance to identify if that stability is then being leveraged into increased academic performance. It is assumed that the policy-writers did intend for academic performance to be the ultimate target of the many requirements of MVA.

**Conclusion**

In recognition of the growing number of homeless students, it is imperative that states and districts evaluate how they are identifying students who are homeless and, potentially of more importance, how they are supporting those students and their families. Districts must be committed to supporting these students so they can play an important role in helping the student overcome the barriers associated with being homeless. Within this section, administrators and districts have been provided with recommendations that would assist them in going beyond simply being compliant with MVA, better meeting the needs of their students and their families when faced with being homeless.
Appendix A: Survey, Created in Qualtrics

1) How many years have you been in education?
2) How long have you been in your current role?
3) Which of the following best applies to you?
   a. The liaison for homeless student services
   b. The supervisor of the liaison for homeless student services
4) What is your highest degree obtained?
   a. Bachelor’s
   b. Master’s
   c. Specialist
   d. Doctorate
   e. Other: __________
5) Would you identify your district as urban, suburban, or rural?
   a. Urban
   b. Suburban
   c. Rural
6) What is the total enrollment of your district?
   a. 0-2,999
   b. 3,000-9,999
   c. 10,000 and up
7) What are the job titles you currently hold? (List your titles, i.e. Homeless Liaison, Director of Federal Programs, Deputy Superintendent, and so on)

To What Extent
7) Likert Scale: Our district implements the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act well. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
8) When reflecting on the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in your district, what strengths do you believe exist, if any?
9) When reflecting on the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in your district, what opportunities for improvement do you believe exist, if any?
10) Likert Scale: Our district sufficiently meets the needs of students experiencing homelessness. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please provide your rationale for a yes or no.
11) Likert Scale: Our staff receives adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please explain your rating.
In What Ways
11) What services are available to students experiencing homelessness in your district?
12) How do you make families aware of services available to them if they are homeless?
13) How do you, or your district, identify students who are homeless?
14) In what ways do you, or your district, communicate with and support families who are experiencing homelessness?
15) What do you view to be the pillars of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?
16) Likert Scale: As a homeless liaison, or a supervisor of a homeless liaison, I have received adequate training in how to oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please explain your rating, including any specific professional development you have participated in.

Opt-In Questions
1. Are you willing to participate in an interview to discuss your role as either a homeless liaison or as the supervisor of a homeless liaison?
   a) Yes
   b) No
2. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please enter your email address. If you are selected for an interview, the researcher will follow-up with you soon to schedule.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

RQ 1: To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

RQ 2: In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

1) Thank you for talking with me today, (insert name). I am glad to have your input and expertise on this research, and I really appreciate your time. Do you mind if I record this conversation so that I can focus on listening?

2) How would you describe your role as a homeless liaison (or supervisor of homeless liaison)?

3) When you think about students experiencing homelessness, what do you believe to be their needs?

4) Following up to number 3, in what ways do you, or your district, go about meeting these needs?

5) In what ways do you communicate with families experiencing homelessness?

6) If I were to interview a family experiencing homelessness in your district, what strengths would they potentially identify in the ways they have been supported?

7) If I were to interview a family experiencing homelessness in your district, what opportunities for improvement would they potentially identify in the ways they have been supported?

8) To what extent is your district meeting the requirements of MVA?

9) What did not come up in our conversation about students experiencing homelessness that you would like to share?
Appendix C: Artifact Analysis Protocol

**RQ 1:** To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

**RQ 2:** In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

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<tr>
<td>Look For: Page Dedicated to Homelessness</td>
<td>Look For: Contact Information for Homeless Liaison, as reported to DESE on their sheet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look For: Information Regarding Rights of Homeless Students and Families</td>
<td>Look For: Resources for Families Experiencing Homelessness</td>
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Researcher’s overall rating of this site (0-3):
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SECTION VI: SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION
Introduction to Scholarly Practitioner Reflection

As I reflect on the pursuit of my doctorate in Educational Leadership, it is difficult to fully capture the growth I have experienced, both as a learner and as a leader. The dissertation process has continued that journey, helping tie together all of the learning I have experienced so far while relying on the confidence and humility I have built throughout the program. Something that is always with me as I navigate my current life experiences is a frequent comment I hear from others when they learn that I am a school principal and/or when they learn I am completing my doctorate: “Wow! You seem so young to be doing …” While this may be intended as a compliment, it can sometimes strike me wrong, implying that I lack the knowledge to be doing what I am doing.

However, when I read the quote from George et al. (2007/2011), “you can learn from other’s experiences, but there is no way you can be successful when you are trying to be like them. People trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not a replica of someone else” (p. 163), it reminded me that my calling is to purely be genuine and authentic. I am not called to be the smartest, the funniest, or the best. I am called to be me. And I can be the best me by continuing to learn and grow. The dissertation has built my confidence, while also reminding me of why humility is a requirement for being a good leader—we can never believe there is nothing left to learn or that there is no growth left for us to experience.

Dissertation Influence as an Educational Leader

Navigating the dissertation has built within me a desire to continue building my knowledge base as an educational leader. There is not one way to do this, but instead, there are a variety of things I am committed to continuing to do so that my knowledge
base may increase. While this dissertation has built within me a stronger understanding of policy and, specifically, mandates surrounding how students are supported when they are homeless and the rights they are guaranteed, I now recognize the importance of having a strong knowledge base in the many areas of my profession. I desire to be identified as someone who understands their role, is educated, and performs the role guided by knowledge and wisdom. As I began the dissertation, I held assumptions based more on the emotions of my experiences, versus based on knowledge. This resonated with me, as I do not desire to look at my job through an emotional lens that can be manipulated by bias and impulse, but instead through an analytical lens that relies on my knowledge and pursuit of understanding other perspectives.

Another key learning I experienced through the completion of this dissertation is the continual need to understand the lived experiences of others. A crucial experience that contributed to this learning occurred when conducting a phenomenological study with my research group. During this learning, the phenomenological approach resonated with me, as it ties so closely to the work of an educator—everyone I work with comes from a different background and that context has a big impact on how they navigate things differently than their peers. When I experience individuals not agreeing with me or getting behind my decisions, it is important I work to understand their lived experience, presuming positive intent. Mertens (2020) explained that the phenomenological approach “seeks the individual’s perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon or experience and calls upon the researcher to suspend theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations to be able to understand the phenomenon as it exists prior to and independent of scientific knowledge” (p. 255). Conducting that study significantly influenced my desire to use a
mixed methods approach for my dissertation. This approach also aligns with my personal beliefs and skillset, too. When I see disagreement, I can usually target some level of either not understanding the other perspective or a downright refusal to even think differently. I believe the basis of hate is usually tied to one of those realities, too. I have learned that when you understand the stories and experiences of those you disagree with, respect is built; you may still disagree with them, but it is in a way that respects them and allows for all to be honored. When I am faced with making decisions as an educational leader, there are typically going to be those who “win” while others “lose”. It is not as binary as that, but the reality is some will like the decision, while others will not agree with the decision. For me, this process has taught me the importance of understanding the experiences of all of those I am serving so that I can make decisions that honor and respect all, even if the decision does not align with their preference. A key takeaway within this learning has been that impact matters more than intent.

As well, this dissertation has changed me as an educational leader by not allowing my pragmatism to be stuck in negativity or an absence of hope. Helland and Winston (2005) stressed the importance of having hope, explaining hope is a “dynamic, powerful, and pervasive cognitive process that is observable across numerous contexts including that of formal organizations” (p. 42). We had one vivid conversation during the program in which we discussed this piece; going into the conversation, I firmly believe that hope was not a strategy. However, after engaging in the discourse around hope, my entire mindset shifted, as I recognized that the absence of hope must closely align with the absence of action. While conducting the dissertation, I remained hopeful throughout the process, which served as a catalyst for engaging in the cognitive process necessary for
producing this expansive paper. Prior to this process, I used my pragmatic disposition as an excuse to focus on what would not work; this limited the impact I could make, as my focus was on problems instead of solutions.

In the past, my pragmatic belief system could leave me with the mentality of ‘it is what it is’ as I did not see there being one truth, recognizing that context is immensely important. This mindset could leave me skilled at identifying problems, but short on identifying solutions since I believed that each solution would only come with more positives and negatives, dependent on each individual impacted. As Mertens (2020) explained, a pragmatic approach recognizes that “all individuals have their own unique interpretations of that world” (p. 36). Throughout this experience, though, I have now learned how to use my pragmatism to guide my identification of problems and then focus on solutions. I have developed a fundamental belief that it is essential I learn the unique interpretations of others so that I can identify solutions that provide the best benefit for the collective while honoring the individuals impacted. What good is knowing there is a problem without a desire to find a solution? This simple learning has impacted my leadership greatly, making me a much more positive leader focused on taking action to improve problems.

A final area worth noting is a bit more personal to my educational leadership. As a leader, people see me as a very confident leader and it has not been uncommon for me to hear that I have a bit of an ego. While I do not necessarily prioritize what people think about me unless they are people who also invest in me, it has worn on me at times as I hope for people to not believe that I do not care about others or that I am not reflective.
During the fall of 2019, though, we were introduced to the term ‘arrogant humility’.

Theoharis (2008) explained arrogant humility, stating:

The arrogance means that these principals have a headstrong belief that they are right; they know what is best, and they feel they are the ones needed to lead toward that vision. The humility comes from their continual self-doubt of their abilities and knowledge, their willingness to admit mistakes both publicly and privately, and their questioning whether they are doing any good in their positions. (p. 13)

A close peer of mine texted me and explained that she felt this term perfectly described my leadership—she explained that she knew my heart and that I used my private time to be reflective and humble and that I was always willing to own my mistakes. Since that day, I have led with much more confidence due to my knowledge of arrogant humility. Throughout this dissertation, this belief has been further cemented: I am confident in the work I am doing within this study but am constantly doubting my abilities and if I am conveying what I hope to convey in a way that is deserving of the prestigious degree I am seeking.

**Dissertation Influence as a Scholar**

While I have grown significantly as an educational leader due to this dissertation experience, I would argue my greater growth has been as a scholar. Prior to this program, I would not have identified as a scholar and I did little to grow in pursuit of scholarship. However, initially by force and now by choice, I have a strong desire to engage in the scholarship of my profession. I have learned that research is always evolving, so it is important to stay current with new research that may be affirming or challenging past
knowledge and beliefs. It has become important to me to stay in know, being an authentic lifelong learner, not just someone who reads a book here and there and takes on that title. An example of this is found in the impact of my engagement with professional learning. Each year I attend a conference hosted by MAESP, a professional organization I belong to for elementary principals. As a result of seeing myself more as a scholar, I engage in the professional learning differently, more critically. I sit back and listen to and examine the evidence presenters are sharing, deciphering how applicable it may be to my work. I am also examining the merit of what they are presenting—is the evidence they are sharing transferrable? This shift has made me a much more intentional leader, as I examine the information from both the lens of an educational leader and a scholar of the work.

Since I am currently a practitioner within the field of education, I recognize much of my research will connect to my own practice. Heikkinen et al. (2016) defined good practitioner research as “the intentional and systemic inquiry into one’s own practice, and it focuses on both the development of local knowledge and public knowledge” (p. 3). They go on to present the analogy of research being the fuel we need to impact our practice. When I reflect on the impact of setting aside time to read academic-type texts, I recognize the positive benefit it has on me—I feel more equipped to do the work well. In addition, my time spent reading always leaves me feeling refueled. However, I find myself struggling to prioritize setting aside time to engage in this reading consistently. I strive to be more disciplined in this area, as I know the benefits are immense. As the dissertation concludes, I am committed to having the discipline of setting aside time for engaging in academic reading, similar to what I have done throughout my doctoral
program and this dissertation—the amount of hours I have dedicated to this work has been vast and maintaining just a fraction of this time commitment will be worthwhile to my identity as both an educational leader and a scholar.

In addition to now identifying as a scholar, I see the necessity of being both an educational leader and a scholar. When faced with making decisions, a step for me is to identify relevant, recent research that can provide information about the topic. Prior to this experience, I was guilty of going with my somewhat uninformed thoughts when faced with making a decision or by relying purely on my experiences. While my experiences are real, they may not represent the experiences of all and my experiences may lack transferability. Now, to build my knowledge base, I regularly seek out information and knowledge that can assist me in making informed decisions. For instance, I subscribe to an email list in which I receive a weekly email that summarizes research in the field of education, linking to the full articles. I read this each week, paying special attention to the articles that relate specifically to my position. This mindset has made me more knowledgeable on the larger scale of education, versus just having knowledge of education in the context of Springfield, Missouri. I have also been utilizing a scholarly mindset when people come to me proposing we change the way we are doing something—I ask them to identify research that supports their proposition and to send it to me as I consider their idea.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, I now embrace the need to get and understand multiple perspectives. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) stressed the need for such openness, stating “at the root of learning leadership is the practice of openness” (p. 21). They went on to describe what openness is, defining it as “the willingness to
entertain a variety of alternative perspectives, be receptive to contributions from everyone
regardless of previous attainment or current status, and create dialogic open space” (p. 21). Before this program, I was guilty of regularly considering only my perspective and
potentially the perspective of a couple of people close to me. Now, I recognize that
scholarship is filled with presenting the perspectives of many. To be an effective leader, I
must engage with scholarly work, using the work to either affirm my current practice or
challenge it so that I can continue to learn how to be a more effective leader. As well, I
recognize that data are not the absolute I viewed it as before my doctoral work and this
dissertation. Now, I recognize data can be presented in a variety of ways, sometimes
being manipulated into telling a story it potentially does not tell. I have become much
more critical when people start with “the data says…”. The learning for me is evident, as
I use to start most data conversations with that statement.

**Conclusion**

I do not know what the future holds, as none of us do. However, I face the future
with confidence and far more humility. A mentor of mine regularly says “the more I
learn, the more I know how little I know”. Prior to this program, I would laugh at this
comment seeing it as purely a funny quip. However, I now recognize how incredibly
accurate this statement is when reflecting on the impact of this program. That is the
humility I now live with and use as a guide to my leadership. As a result of this program
and dissertation, I will forever have the identity of an educational leader and scholar—
these identities, if cultivated and applied, have the ability to impact many others over
time. That impact is the reason I became an educator and is a primary reason for my
pursuit of this doctorate. Even though I will soon be Dr. Thomas Masterson, which is a
recognition of how much I have learned, I fully know and embrace that I have so much to still learn.
REFERENCES


https://www.maesp.com/


Appendix A: Survey, Created in Qualtrics

8) How many years have you been in education?
9) How long have you been in your current role?
10) Which of the following best applies to you?
    a. The liaison for homeless student services
    b. The supervisor of the liaison for homeless student services
11) What is your highest degree obtained?
    a. Bachelor’s
    b. Master’s
    c. Specialist
    d. Doctorate
    e. Other: __________
12) Would you identify your district as urban, suburban, or rural?
    a. Urban
    b. Suburban
    c. Rural
13) What is the total enrollment of your district?
    a. 0-2,999
    b. 3,000-9,999
    c. 10,000 and up
14) What are the job titles you currently hold? (List your titles, i.e. Homeless Liaison, Director of Federal Programs, Deputy Superintendent, and so on)

To What Extent
12) Likert Scale: Our district implements the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act well. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
13) When reflecting on the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in your district, what strengths do you believe exist, if any?
14) When reflecting on the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in your district, what opportunities for improvement do you believe exist, if any?
15) Likert Scale: Our district sufficiently meets the needs of students experiencing homelessness. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please provide your rationale for a yes or no.
16) Likert Scale: Our staff receives adequate training in how to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please explain your rating.
In What Ways

17) What services are available to students experiencing homelessness in your district?
18) How do you make families aware of services available to them if they are homeless?
19) How do you, or your district, identify students who are homeless?
20) In what ways do you, or your district, communicate with and support families who are experiencing homelessness?
21) What do you view to be the pillars of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act?
22) Likert Scale: As a homeless liaison, or a supervisor of a homeless liaison, I have received adequate training in how to oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Slightly Agree, Slightly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Please explain your rating, including any specific professional development you have participated in.

Opt-In Questions

1. Are you willing to participate in an interview to discuss your role as either a homeless liaison or as the supervisor of a homeless liaison?
   a) Yes
   b) No
2. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please enter your email address. If you are selected for an interview, the researcher will follow-up with you soon to schedule.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

**RQ 1:** To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

**RQ 2:** In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?

10) Thank you for talking with me today, (insert name). I am glad to have your input and expertise on this research, and I really appreciate your time. Do you mind if I record this conversation so that I can focus on listening?

11) How would you describe your role as a homeless liaison (or supervisor of homeless liaison)?

12) When you think about students experiencing homelessness, what do you believe to be their needs?

13) Following up to number 3, in what ways do you, or your district, go about meeting these needs?

14) In what ways do you communicate with families experiencing homelessness?

15) If I were to interview a family experiencing homelessness in your district, what strengths would they potentially identify in the ways they have been supported?

16) If I were to interview a family experiencing homelessness in your district, what opportunities for improvement would they potentially identify in the ways they have been supported?

17) To what extent is your district meetings the requirements of MVA?

18) What did not come up in our conversation about students experiencing homelessness that you would like to share?
Appendix C: Artifact Analysis Protocol

*RQ 1: To what extent is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?*

*RQ 2: In what ways is the McKinney-Vento Act implemented as intended in the state of Missouri?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District:</th>
<th>Website:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look For: Link on Homepage Regarding Homelessness</td>
<td>Look For: The Process for Locating Information Regarding Homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look For: Page Dedicated to Homelessness</td>
<td>Look For: Contact Information for Homeless Liaison, as reported to DESE on their sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look For: Information Regarding Rights of Homeless Students and Families</td>
<td>Look For: Resources for Families Experiencing Homelessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher’s overall rating of this site (0-3):
Appendix D: Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in An Implementation Fidelity Evaluation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in the State of Missouri
Missouri State University & University of Missouri

Introduction
You are invited to participate in a research study focused on the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in Missouri. Before you agree to participate in this study, please read and understand the following explanation and procedures involved. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the investigator. If you have more questions later, you may contact the investigator or their dissertation advisor at:

Primary Investigator: Thomas Masterson (tomfnd@mail.missouri.edu)
Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Cynthia MacGregor (cmacgregor@MissouriState.edu)

Taking part in this study is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. If you decide to stop, you do not have to give a reason and there will be no negative consequences for ending your participation.

Purpose of this Study
You are being asked to participate in a research study focused on how the McKinney-Vento Act, which is federal legislation targeted at supporting children and youths who are homeless, is being implemented within Missouri. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation, while also providing practitioners, particularly administrators, with guidance on how to best implement the legislation.

The researcher is required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation including why you might or might not want to participate and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to discuss and ask the researcher any questions you may have. This study may include participating in an interview, focus group, or completing a survey. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate or change your mind later, your decision will have no negative consequences.

What are the risks?
There are no known risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

What are the benefits?
You may not benefit directly from this study. However, the information from this study will be shared with administrators who may choose to implement suggestions based on findings.

**How will my privacy be protected?**
The data for this project is being collected anonymously. Data will be coded, with identifying information kept on a secure, password-protected server. Information about you will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. The identities of all research participants will remain anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to your data. Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data.

**Cost and Compensation**
Participants should not incur any costs for participating in this study, nor will you receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

**Consent to Participate**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign below:
I have read and understand the information in this form. Any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this form, I agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time. I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date__________
Printed Name of Participant ____________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ____________________________ Date__________
VITA

Thomas Owen Masterson is a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program at the University of Missouri. This statewide doctoral program is in partnership with Missouri State University. Thomas also has a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Missouri State and a Master of Science in Educational Administration from Missouri State. Thomas is currently employed by Springfield Public Schools as an elementary principal. He lives in Springfield, Missouri, with his wife and three children.