

NDPS Certification Program Field Project Report

**Fort Worth Independent School District
The O.P.E.N. Doors Homeless Program**

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Funding Sources:

The O.P.E.N. Doors Homeless Program is subsidized by the Texas Education of Homeless Children and Youth (TEFHCY) grant and the Texas Education Agency Title I set-aside funds.

Project Cost and Budget Narrative:

The grant is a competitive grant that provides O.P.E.N. Doors with the funding to identify and meet the needs of Fort Worth ISD (FWISD) homeless students. TEFHCY provides a 3-year funding cycle, thus allowing FWISD to apply for the grant every three years. The next application for the grant is in spring 2020.

The allocation of funds is determined by the District's homeless needs, the number of students served, services warranted, attendance and academic achievements. The funding varies year to year and increases as the number of identified homeless students are identified for assistance.

The Specialist and Liaison's salaries are paid from the Title I allocated budget. O.P.E.N. Doors program collaborates with many state, regional and local resources and homeless shelters available within the Fort Worth area.

Project Description:

Homelessness is an epidemic and caused by many negative life factors in families' lives. This epidemic negatively affects many of the FWISD students. FWISD makes optimal efforts to provide every student with a highly competitive academic education. In 2017-2018, 77.6% of FWISD students were considered economically disadvantaged, with 1,028 students reported to be experiencing housing hardships and homelessness in 2018-2019. Currently, 4275 identifiable students are considered homeless or unaccompanied minors. O.P.E.N. Doors is a special program that strives to provide transient and indigent students and families with educational accommodations as required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001; furthermore, supplemental services and resources were provided to the students and families experiencing homelessness.

O.P.E.N. Doors assists identified displaced families enrolling students into school without anxieties of penalties and restrictions. Students considered as an unaccompanied minor and/or are not living in a permanent residence are enrolled in a school without hesitation or inconveniences. The FWISD Student Residency Questionnaire and/or by self-report identifies students that can be classified as homeless.

O.P.E.N. Doors collaborates with the community, parents and school personnel to ensure all students received an equitable and egalitarian education that is not hindered by any economic disadvantages.

Staffing Pattern:

The staffing pattern for the O.P.E.N. Doors department is as follows:

- Assistant Superintendent (1)
- Director of Open Doors (1)

- Administrative Associate (1)
- Specialist (1)
- Liaison (1)

Population Served:

The population served by the O.P.E.N. Doors Program ranges from Pre-K through 12th Grade. Services are provided to self-reported students and their families in the district who declare homelessness because of life difficulties such as:

- Living in a motel
- Living in an emergency or transitional shelter
- Living in a car, park or public place
- Living in the home of friends or family due to eviction or economic hardships
- Living in a campground, inadequate trailer or substandard housing
- Living alone as an unaccompanied minor

Project Origination:

The origination of the O.P.E.N. Doors program emerged from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001 and the No Child Left Behind of 2001 legislation. No Child Left Behind 2002 was amended from The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). These legislations assures that all disadvantaged students were safeguarded and guaranteed improvements in the achievement of academics, regardless of race, income, zip code, disability, background, and home language.

The O.P.E.N. Doors program was instituted to meet the needs of the Fort Worth ISD community. FWISD desired to ensure every student received an education regardless of their economic status and disadvantages, reflecting the mission of the Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) Program.

FWISD’s O.P.E.N. Doors program collaborates with all local shelters, community resources, and county and state agencies. The program allows students to attend the school of origin or area where relatives reside.

Issues Addressed:

O.P.E.N. Doors addresses many issues that may hinder a student from achieving their best academically or socially at school. The program is one of many resources implemented to assist the family with hindrances, which may impede a student from becoming a successful student. As students are identified, resources are provided. A vital part of the program is to address issues such as:

- Displacement of permanent residency and/or living in a shelter
- Lack of food, transportation, and medical services
- No identification of birth, social security or Texas ID
- Deprived social, emotional and mental health
- Truancy behaviors and low academic functions
- Lack of daycare services

Desired Outcomes and Measurable Objectives:

The primary objective is to measure academic improvement. Grades are tracked to ensure the tutoring programs offered are improving the academic gaps in comparison with their grade-level peers throughout the District. All students' attendance in the O.P.E.N. Doors program is tracked to measure the validity of services provided, such as how providing transportation can result in an increase in attendance rates and a decrease in dropout rates.

Additionally, other desirable outcomes are to increase the number of self-reports with transient and homeless students and to provide assistance with educational resources. The desire is to increase a student's academics and attendance rates to $\leq 95\%$.

The focus is to help the students succeed in school, not to "fix" their homeless situation.

Strategies and/or Interventions of the Project:

Awareness of strategies and interventions are key factors in building trust between FWISD and families. FWISD promotes positive awareness and understanding to ensure the students' parents feel their child's education and families' wellbeing are the priority. It is mandated that all information is confidential and complies with FERPA guidelines. The interventions provided by the program are:

- Immediate school enrollment without penalties or prolonged waiting periods
- Enrollment in the free school meal program
- Referrals to community agencies for food, health services, bus passes, and school attire
- Transportation to and from a school of origin
- Dispute resolution regarding school enrollment
- Tutoring
- Educational field trips and summer camps
- Family counseling and parenting help
- Parent educational seminars

District-wide training with Principals, School Leadership and other school staff is provided throughout the school year. This ensures all district stakeholders are mindful of the homeless students' needs and are complying with the provisions and requirements of the McKinney-Vento legislation.

Results (Outcomes and Achievements):

Outcomes and achievements are prominent by the supported data. The inherent result shows an increase in self-reports from 1,028 (2018-19) to 4,275 (2019-20). As a result of the increased need to facilitate services, a liaison position was added to assist with the O.P.E.N Doors program. Many favorable results are indicated by the following:

- Graduation
- Academic improvement
- Parent educators engagement with the families at the local shelters

- Increase assistance for the families
- Provide positive stability for the student
- Waive fees for field trips and extracurricular activities
- Free physicals for economically disadvantaged students

Project Timeline:

The students and families receive services for a year. The families update the FWISD Residential Survey each school year to determine their residential status and qualification for the program. No questions are asked for proof of residency.

Outcomes Related to School Completion, Dropout Prevention, and/or Graduation Rates:

The outcomes related to school completion, dropout prevention and/or graduation rates are evident in the District’s increased graduation completion rate and decreased dropout rate. Fort Worth ISD is a recognized district that provides a continuance of social and emotional support for the families. Graduating students benefit from receiving assistance with graduation services.

The families and students recognize the value of the services from participating in the O.P.E. N. Doors program. The goal is to decrease the stigmatism of homelessness and increase the students’ academic well-being.

Special Conditions, Expertise, and/or Skills Required to Carry Out Project:

Individuals with a background in social work are a great fit to work in the program. The individual must possess the ability to work with diverse and at-risk populations, can convey written and oral communications well, be at ease with people from a variety of socio/economic backgrounds, and can manage the challenges of working with the homeless population.

The Coordinator and Specialist are experts and maintain the program in compliance with updated legislation regulations. They answer all questions and are well informed regarding the needs of the families; furthermore, they follow-up with families to ensure their academic needs are being met while in the O.P.E.N. Doors program. The Fort Worth ISD stakeholders are trained and updated yearly regarding the importance of abiding by the federal legislation of the McKinney-Vento Act.

Current Status of Project:

O.P.E.N. Doors program works fervently with the homeless students and families. The current status of the project is in the third year of the grant cycle. Every three years, Fort Worth ISD reapplies for the renewal of Texas Education of Homeless Children and Youth (TEHCY) grant and the Title I set-aside grant funding. During this time, the facilitation of services is provided continuously throughout the district, with no gaps in the services. Funding is based on the needs of the community, students, and families.

Role in Project as an NDPS Certification Program Participant:

It is my role as a Stay-in-School Coordinator to identify the cause of students’ truancy behaviors. I implement restorative practices to work with all families, regardless of financial hardships and homelessness, to collaborate with school team members to explore academic solutions and community resources to maintain students in class and school.

Lessons Learned:

I have recognized the resiliency of FWISD's students and families. Trust from the students and families takes time, however, the students' stories of inspiration to beat the odds and challenges of homelessness are remarkable.

Other challenges are determining which families are transient. For various reasons, many families will not present and report their homelessness, even when the Fort Worth ISD endorses respect, confidentiality, and resources for the families. The O.P.E.N Doors program provides short term, immediate assistance throughout the students' academic career. O.P.E.N. Doors is a vital entity with continued work to be done.

As a leader, I am reminded to give thanks for my life and all that exists in it; furthermore, my blessings are not to be taken for granted. I must use my expertise to assist others in need and reciprocate appreciation to all.

Advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners about the Project:

My advice for Dropout Prevention Practitioners is to ensure their district or program has a way to identify homeless students and families, to build a multidisciplinary team to implement support for the families and to follow up with the families frequently. Time is vital in pursuing and providing resources. The family may or may not recognize the efforts and desire to assist them to be successful—help them anyway. It takes a village.



O.P.E.N. DOORS – SPECIAL PROGRAMS

The information on this form is required to meet the law known as the McKinney-Vento Act 42 U.S.C. 11342(2), which is also known as Title X, part C of the No Child Left Behind Act. The answers you give will help the school determine the services the student is eligible to receive. Presenting a false record or falsifying records is an offense under Section 37.10, Penal Code, and enrollment of the child under false documents subjects the person to liability for tuition or other costs. TEC Sec. 29.002(3)(d).

Student's Name _____ Student's ID # _____

Enrolling School _____ Student's Date of Birth _____ Grade ____ Gender: M F

- 1. Is the student's current address a temporary living arrangement? Yes ____ No ____
2. If "yes," is the temporary living arrangement due to any of the following: loss of housing, economic hardship, domestic violence, unhealthy living conditions, parent/legal guardian deployed, parent/legal guardian incarcerated, other emergency circumstance? Yes ____ No ____

IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO BOTH QUESTIONS, PLEASE COMPLETE FORM. IF NOT, PLEASE STOP HERE.

- 3. Where is the student currently living? CHECK ONLY ONE:
Emergency shelter
Transitional housing (housing available only for a certain length of time and partly or completely paid for by a church, nonprofit, or other entity)
Hotel or motel (due to economic hardship or emergency situation)
In the home of friends or relatives due to any of the reasons listed in Question 2
Unsheltered (car, park, campground, street, abandoned building or substandard housing)
4. How long has the student lived at the current address? _____ (Response required)
5. Is a parent or legal guardian living with the student? Yes ____ No ____
6. Name of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Caregiver _____ Phone _____
7. Student's Address _____
Street City Zip
8. Has the student been placed in Texas Department of Family and Protective Services kinship care, volunteer care, or Foster care? Yes ____ No ____ (If "yes," present the copy of the Texas DFPS Placement Authorization Form #2085)
9. Please list any siblings at other FWISD schools:
Name _____ School _____
Name _____ School _____
Name _____ School _____
10. Please list any siblings (name and age) that are not enrolled in school: _____

Signature of parent, legal guardian, caregiver, or unaccompanied student _____ Date _____

PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED FORM TO YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

IMPORTANT!! SCHOOL PERSONNEL: Please scan only the forms where BOTH Questions 1 and 2 are checked "Yes" to jo.carter@fwisd.org. Send all other SRQ forms promptly through District mail to O.P.E.N. Doors, Suite SW240. Please Do Not mail Military Child forms to this office. Thank you!

FOR O.P.E.N. DOORS USE ONLY

Unaccompanied Student (i.e., is not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian)
Received services under McKinney-Vento program at any time during the current school year: Yes ____ No ____

I certify the above named student qualifies for the Child Nutrition Program under the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act.
McKinney-Vento Liaison _____ Date _____

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