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School Success in Motion: Protective Factors for Academic Achievement in Homeless and Highly Mobile Children in Minneapolis

by Ann S. Masten, David Heistad, J. J. Cutuli, Janette E. Herbers, Jelena Obradović, Chi-Keung Chan, Elizabeth Hinz, and Jeffrey D. Long

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A child living with parents at a shelter demonstrates one of the executive function tasks with graduate student Danielle Holmes. The child is asked to sort cards by color or shape, testing cognitive flexibility as the rules switch.

During the 1980s, the face of homelessness changed, as families with children began to use emergency shelters in the Twin Cities and across the country. In 1985, the Minnesota Department of Economic Security reported 290 dependent children with families in shelters statewide on a single night in November. A decade later, in November 1995, this number had risen more than 500% to 1,532 children. By 2005, it was 2,477. The proportion of the total sheltered homeless population in Minnesota who were children in families has risen sharply during the last two decades, increasing from 23% in 1985 to 39% in 2008. These counts of sheltered individuals did not include many other children living with families doubled up with each other in the same residence or young "sofa surfers" staying with friends.

Two decades ago, it was not feasible to accurately compute the numbers of homeless children attending school during a given academic year, because records simply did not exist. However, school access was known to be a major problem for children lacking a stable home address. Many young people were not able to attend or remain in their school of origin due to residency requirements, lack of transportation, or missing records. In the 1980s, alarming data on the status of homeless children, as well as adults, motivated the U.S. Congress to enact legislation that addressed housing, health, and other needs of the nation's homeless (see sidebar, p. 4). This federal legislation also mandated school access for homeless children and youth, while providing modest support to states for addressing educational issues for the homeless. This legislation has been amended over the

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

In the 1980s, school access was a major problem for children with unstable housing. Growing general concerns about the health and education of homeless children and adults motivated the U.S. Congress to enact The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. Among other provisions, this law mandated school access for homeless children and youth, while providing modest support to states for addressing educational issues. This legislation has been amended over the years. It was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to honor the memory of Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota, a leading supporter of the legislation. In 2001, McKinney-Vento was reauthorized by Congress and incorporated into the No Child Left Behind Act as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act.

years and was ultimately incorporated into the No Child Left Behind Act.

Over time, school access requirements have been strengthened, including a provision requiring school districts to provide transportation so that homeless children could continue attending their school of origin during an episode of residential instability. As requirements and resources mandated for homeless children and youth increased, attendance improved. Statewide surveys by Wilder Research in Minnesota indicate an increase in school attendance by homeless children over time, with 90% attendance reported by parents on the day of the survey in 2006. This is the highest attendance rate ever reported in their surveys, and approaches the average daily attendance in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Progress has been made since the early 1980s in terms of school access for homeless children, but there are growing concerns about achievement disparities. Although data were often limited to one-time assessments or nonrepresentative samples, most information on the academic achievement of homeless and highly mobile children has indicated large gaps between these children and their more-advantaged peers, and smaller gaps between homeless and other poor but less-mobile children (see sidebar on p. 7 for a definition of "homeless and highly mobile"). A risk gradient appeared to exist, with low-income children performing more poorly than middle-class children, and homeless children faring even worse. These results were not surprising, given that children in homeless families typically have additional risk factors for school success, including more ongoing stress or trauma, more intense poverty, parents with more difficulties, and more disconnection from family or community supports.

Over time, reporting requirements for school districts have expanded. School districts in Minnesota are required to identify and track homeless students in each school, and report their school attendance and academic assessment results to the Minnesota Department of Education. Tracking homeless children in schools has proven to be a formidable task. There are many challenging issues, including how to implement a broader definition of homelessness that includes highly mobile and doubled-up children, and how to ensure that homeless children are included in prekindergarten screening and standardized testing. The Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), with a history of commitment to inclusion and the use of test data to inform practice, invested significant time and effort in addressing these challenges.

Recently, we have been involved in two interrelated and ongoing University of Minnesota–community collaborative projects aimed at understanding and promoting school success in homeless and highly mobile (HHM) children. One project draws on data now collected routinely by MPS to examine achievement and attendance over time in HHM students compared with other district children. These data capture the big picture of achievement for children in MPS, documenting educational disparities among HHM students. The second project assessed and followed a much smaller group of children in families who were living in emergency shelters in Minneapolis as the children entered kindergarten and first grade. These data provide a much closer look at the potential protective factors that may promote school success.

In this article, we highlight our initial findings from these two projects and their implications for Minnesota stakeholders. Both projects have the ultimate objective of informing interventions to address achievement disparities in HHM students. The research upon which this article is based was supported in part by a grant from CURA's Faculty Interactive Research Program. Additional support was provided by the senior author's McKnight professorship, by another author's fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health, and by the Center for Neurobehavioral Development at the University of Minnesota.

Research Purpose and Methods

Our two studies used distinct methodologies and data sets, as described below. We also describe here our rationale for conducting our second study on protective factors that may promote school success.

District Data on Achievement of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students. In the first study reported on here, we analyzed de-identified data from MPS to document achievement and attendance patterns in the district. The initial data set included children in MPS during the 2003–2004 through the 2005–2006 school years. By the 2003–2004 school year, the MPS district had implemented a reliable system for identifying HHM students, making it possible to compare HHM students with other students over time. We were particularly interested in comparing HHM students to other low-income students who were not classified as HHM, as well as to the other students in the district who were relatively more advantaged.

These data afforded an unprecedented opportunity to study patterns of academic performance over time, including multiple school years and repeated assessments of achievement for many students. For the initial analyses, we focused on students in second through fifth grade during the 2003–2004 school year and considered their achievement through the 2005–2006 school year, because these grades and school years included three consecutive administrations of the same nationally standardized test, the Northwest Achievement Levels Test (NALT). The sample for analysis included 14,754 children, including all the students for whom MPS had any NALT data in math or reading from any assessment conducted during the three school years we studied. The sample

represented approximately 88% of the children enrolled in the relevant grades.

We designated three mutually exclusive groups for our analyses: (1) HHM students, which included students who were designated HHM *at any time* during the three school years (9.5% of the district sample); (2) low-income students, which included children who qualified for free or reduced-fee lunch but were *not* classified by MPS as HHM (66.3%); and (3) advantaged students, who were those not classified as either HHM or low income, and therefore considered to be relatively advantaged (24.2%).

Protective Factors Promoting School Success. In the second study reported on here, we looked beyond district data to examine individual sheltered families with young school-aged children. Our rationale was that, although district data provide an account of the big picture, school districts cannot routinely measure the key variables that developmental scientists would expect to explain the striking variations observed in achievement among HHM children For example, children could differ in level of risk or trauma experienced and also in the resources and protections present in their lives. We knew from our own earlier studies of homeless families in Minneapolis that a child's level of risk could play a role in school adjustment, including grades and behavior (i.e., as risk level rises, a child's problems also rise), and also that effective parenting was likely to be an important protective factor.[1] Parenting skills are an appealing possibility for intervention, because strong evidence indicates that low-income parents who are interested in improving the behavior of their children can learn skills that have lasting positive effects on their children.

In addition, we were intrigued by exciting new research linked to advances in knowledge about brain development, stress, and a set of cognitive self-regulation skills known as *executive functions* that help children control their attention and behavior. These executive function skills appear to be essential for school readiness and show rapid development around ages 3 to 7, corresponding with changes in brain development. School success requires executive functions, including skills to direct attention, ignore distractions, control impulses, follow rules, and also flexibly adapt to rule changes. Whether a child is learning to read, minding the teacher about classroom rules, or getting along with other children, these self-regulation skills are fundamental tools for learning.

Research has indicated that these "tools of the mind"[2] are particularly important for high-risk children, and also that stressful early experiences might disrupt their development. We hypothesized that executive function skills might be particularly important for HHM children transitioning into school. Another reason we were very interested in these capabilities was because there is emerging evidence that executive function skills can be improved through special preschool curricula or focused training. We thought it was important to choose targets for study that might have implications for future intervention efforts.

Thus, as we were analyzing the "big picture" MPS district data, we also initiated research with young children in a homeless shelter that focused on the potential role of executive function in achievement. Additionally, we considered measures of biological stress in the child, family history of risk, and parenting differences as potentially important influences on school success in HHM children. An important secondary goal of this work was to demonstrate the feasibility of conducting this kind of study in a homeless shelter, including the testing of children with state-of-the-art measures usually reserved for laboratory settings at universities.

In the summer of 2006, we began to recruit families living in the People Serving People shelter in Minneapolis for a new project on protective factors for school success. The goal of this research was to understand and eventually to develop interventions to boost academic achievement in highly mobile children.

The children we studied were 5 to 7 years old and entering kindergarten or first grade. All the families with an eligible child staying in the shelter during data collection that summer and fall were invited to participate. Many families were interested in the project, and 86% of eligible families participated. Children completed a battery of assessments designed to measure executive function skills. We also measured cortisol, a hormone related to stress, by sampling saliva during the child assessments and in the morning after children woke up. Parents completed an interview about family history and the child's behavior. After the children began school, we sent their teachers a widely used questionnaire that assesses academic performance, health, and behavior at school.

Of the 58 children in 58 different families who participated, 54 of the

[1] Ann S. Masten and Arturo Sesma, Jr., "Risk and Resilience Among Children Homeless in Minneapolis," *CURA Reporter* 29 (1999): 1–6. Available at www.cura.umn.edu/reporter/99-Jan/article1.pdf.

[2] See A. Diamond, W.S. Barnett, J. Thomas, and S. Munro, "Preschool Program Improves Cognitive Control," *Science* 318 (2007): 1387–1388.

Table 1. Demographic and Enrollment Characteristics of MPS District Sample of Second to Fifth Graders

Group	Number	Gender (pct. girls/boys)	Ethnicity (% of each group)					ELL (%)	Attendance Rate (%)
			AI	AA	AS	HI	WH		
Advantaged	3,569	49/51	2.0	17.3	5.5	4.2	71.0	2.7	96.3
Low-income	9,788	49/51	4.5	49.8	15.8	19.5	10.5	35.2	94.3
HHM	1,397	48/52	7.9	70.8	7.5	6.5	7.3	12.2	90.2
Total	**14,754**	**49/51**	**4.2**	**43.9**	**12.5**	**14.5**	**24.8**	**22.8**	**94.4**

Note: AI = American Indian; AA = African American; AS = Asian; HI = Hispanic; WH = White; ELL = English Language Learner; Attendance = Averaged daily attendance. Sample included students in four grade cohorts (second to fifth grade during the 2003–2004 school year) who had NALT test data for any of three consecutive test administrations (spring 2004, spring 2005, fall 2005).

children were found to be enrolled in Twin Cities metropolitan area schools. Four children could not be located and their families apparently had moved away from the area. We sent packets to schools for principals to give to each child's teacher. Of 54 packets sent out to 35 different schools, 100% of the teachers responded. We view this exceptional response rate as a reflection of the deep concerns shared by principals and teachers regarding the education of highly mobile children and their commitment to research that can inform educational practice, address educational achievement, and foster resilience.

The Big Picture: Academic Achievement and School Attendance of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students

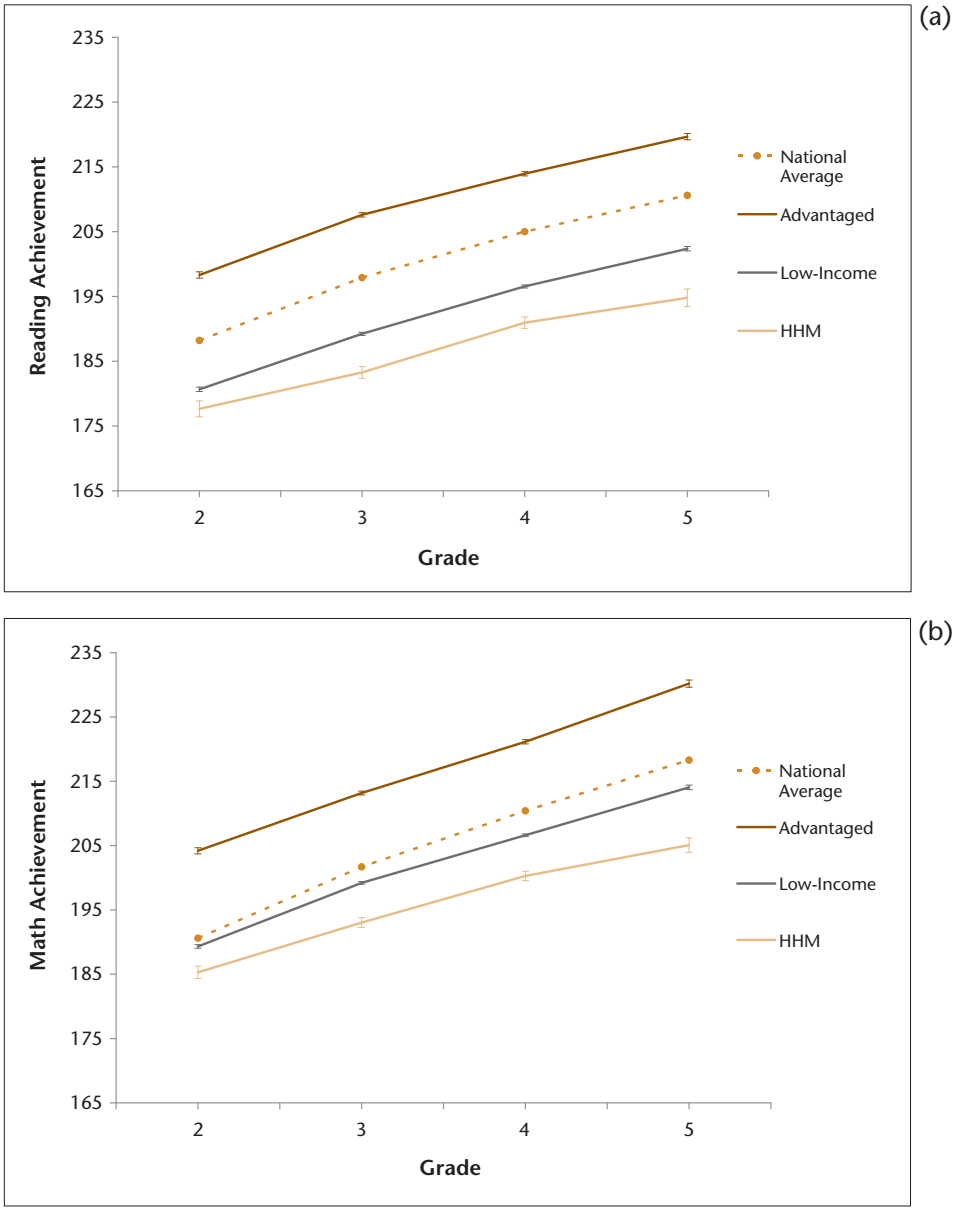
Table 1 shows the demographic and enrollment characteristics of the students in the study sample, including gender, ethnicity, English Language Learner (ELL) status, and attendance. Three-fourths of the MPS second through fifth grade students in the study sample (75.8%) were living in poverty, based on their eligibility for free/reduced fee lunch or their status as homeless/highly mobile, and these children were disproportionately children of color. A high percentage of the HHM students were African American, which is consistent with national data on homeless families in many cities. The data also reflect the large numbers of immigrant children in the district at this time, with many designated as ELL. Attendance was high for the advantaged students, in line with targets set by the district (95%), and for the low-income group, attendance was close to target attendance rates. It was not surprising, however, to find that the average daily attendance of HHM students was lower than both of the other groups. Although short of district goals, the HHM attendance rate of 90.2% was consistent with the level found in the Wilder Research statewide survey in 2006 (90%—the highest level Wilder had observed since the Minnesota survey began in 1991).

To examine achievement patterns, we analyzed data from three administrations of the NALT administered on paper or on computer (scores from each format were comparable). The NALT was specifically designed for testing change and growth in achievement over time for individual students. Data from three districtwide administrations of the NALT were available for these first analyses (spring 2004, spring 2005, and fall 2005).

Using an advanced method for analyzing such data called *growth curve analysis* (linear mixed modeling), we examined the patterns of initial achievement levels and growth of achievement within individuals over time, comparing the levels and change in achievement scores for HHM students with those for other groups. This method allowed us to adjust statistically for missing data, which was helpful given that children may be absent on test day in any given year. We also examined whether enrollment characteristics such as gender or attendance could explain differences in achievement.

Results confirmed our expectations that HHM students as a group have the highest risk for low achievement. Achievement gaps are clear among the youngest students included in the sample (second graders) at the first assessment point, and these gaps remain or worsen over time. We have illustrated our results in two ways. First, we examined combined data for two sequential test administrations (spring 2004 and spring 2005)

Figures 1a and 1b. Mean Scores on Reading and Math from Two Administrations of the NALT (Spring 2004 and Spring 2005) for MPS Students Initially in Second to Fourth Grade

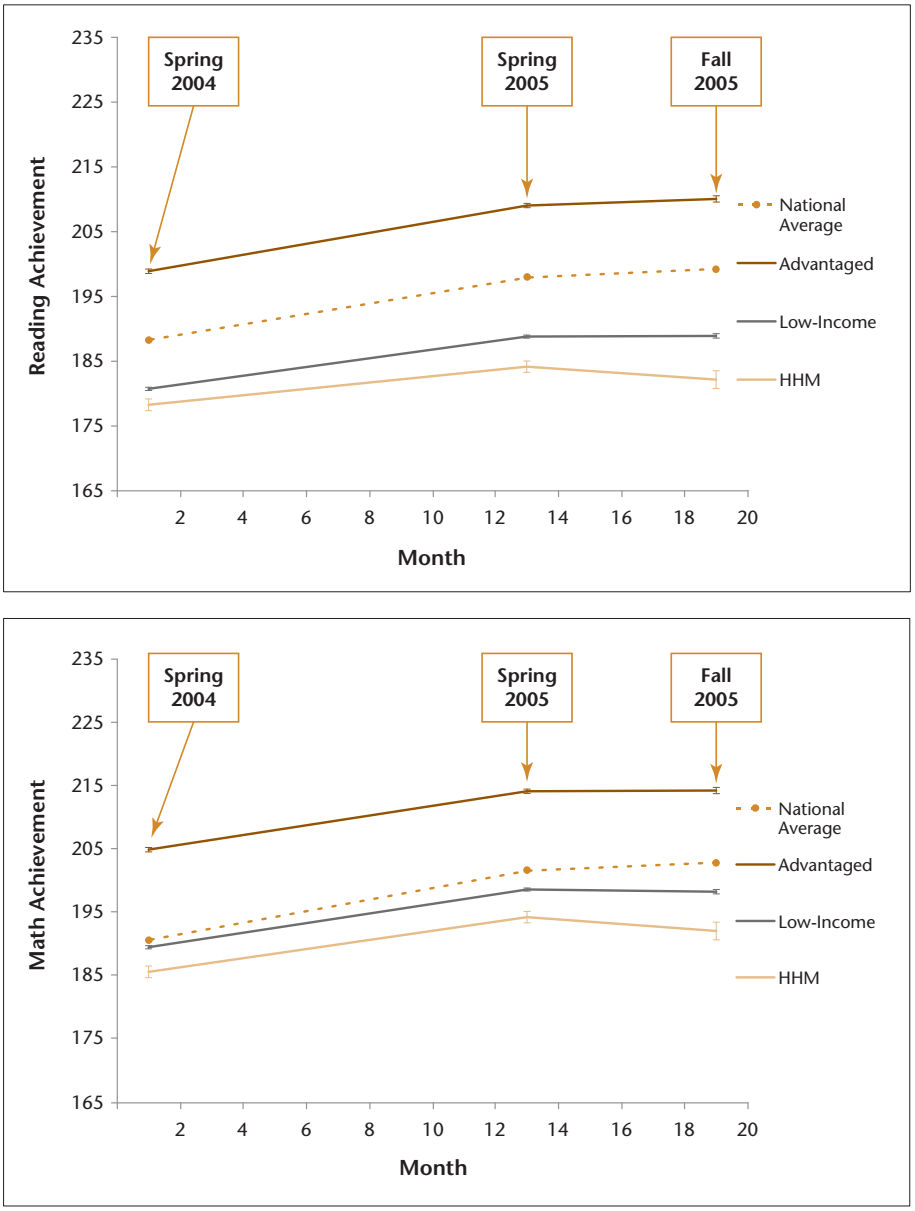


Note: HHM = students who were identified as homeless or highly mobile; low-income = students who qualified for free or reduced-fee lunch but were not HHM; advantaged = students who were neither HHM nor low income. Scores were averaged within grade level (error bars are shown around each mean score to indicate the standard error). The national averages for the tests at each grade level are also shown.

for all students who were in second to fourth grade by the time of the first assessment and had test data for either administration. Figures 1a and b illustrate the general year-to-year pattern of achievement growth by group over time. To provide context, each of these graphs contains a line representing the national average for the test (the 50th percentile by grade and administration of the test). Second, we examined the second grade cohort to assess achievement over three test administrations (spring 2004, spring 2005, and fall 2005), shown in Figures 2a and b. The district shifted from spring to fall assessments in 2005, which made it possible to observe "summer effects"—the widely recognized phenomenon of low or negative growth in learning related to summer vacations from school. Generally, children make less progress or lose ground during the summer when most are not attending school, and this effect tends to be more pronounced in low-income children.

All of these data indicate worrisome achievement gaps, particularly between the advantaged students and both disadvantaged groups. We also tested whether these differences could be accounted for by readily available

Figures 2a and 2b. Mean Scores on Reading and Math across Three School Years for Three Groups of MPS Students in Second Grade, 2003–2004 School Year



Note: HHM = students who were identified as homeless or highly mobile; low-income = students who qualified for free or reduced-fee lunch but were not HHM; advantaged = students who were neither HHM nor low income. Data were drawn from three administrations of the NALT (spring 2004, spring 2005, and fall 2005, when the MPS district shifted to fall testing). The national averages for each test date are also shown.

Defining Homelessness

Defining the scope of homelessness has been challenging and controversial. Federal and state governments, advocates for the homeless, and educators vary in how they count children or adults as homeless. Distinctions are often made between the *literally homeless* (e.g., families or youth living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, abandoned buildings, or cars) and the *precariously housed* (e.g., families or youth doubled up with friends or relatives, representing individuals in imminent danger of becoming literally homeless). Federal legislation passed in the 1980s initially focused on the literally homeless. Educators, however, were also concerned about residentially unstable or *highly mobile* students—meaning those who move multiple times during a school year but are not literally homeless at a given point of assessment. Previous evidence has indicated that residential and related school mobility are important risk factors for academic difficulties. Federal guidelines issued after 2001 mandated the inclusion of precariously housed children and youth in programs targeting improved educational access and support for homeless students.

In the Minneapolis Public Schools, students are defined as homeless and highly mobile (HHM) if they or their families live in any of the following conditions during a given year: in a shelter, motel, car, or campground; on the street; in an abandoned building or similar places; or doubled up with friends or relatives because they cannot find or afford housing. Residential stability and adequate housing are key factors in determining homelessness of students. School enrollment forms include the question, "Are you staying in a shelter or other temporary housing?" A follow-up questionnaire helps district staff inform families and youth of the educational rights and resources available to them.

enrollment data, including gender, ethnicity, ELL status, and attendance rate. These factors were related to test scores in some cases; however, most of the observed differences could not be explained by these variables. Girls, for example, generally had higher reading scores. The "summer effect" was also evident in our analyses for all groups of students, and particularly for the low-income and HHM students.

Next, we took a closer look at individual HHM students to examine the range of achievement and growth in this very high-risk group. The data revealed striking variation in the achievement of HHM children within and across time. Examples are provided in Figures 3a and b, which show test scores for a random 33% of the HHM second graders (66 students for reading, 64 for math) tested in the spring of 2004, and their achievement over time; data for grades 3, 4, and 5 showed similar patterns.

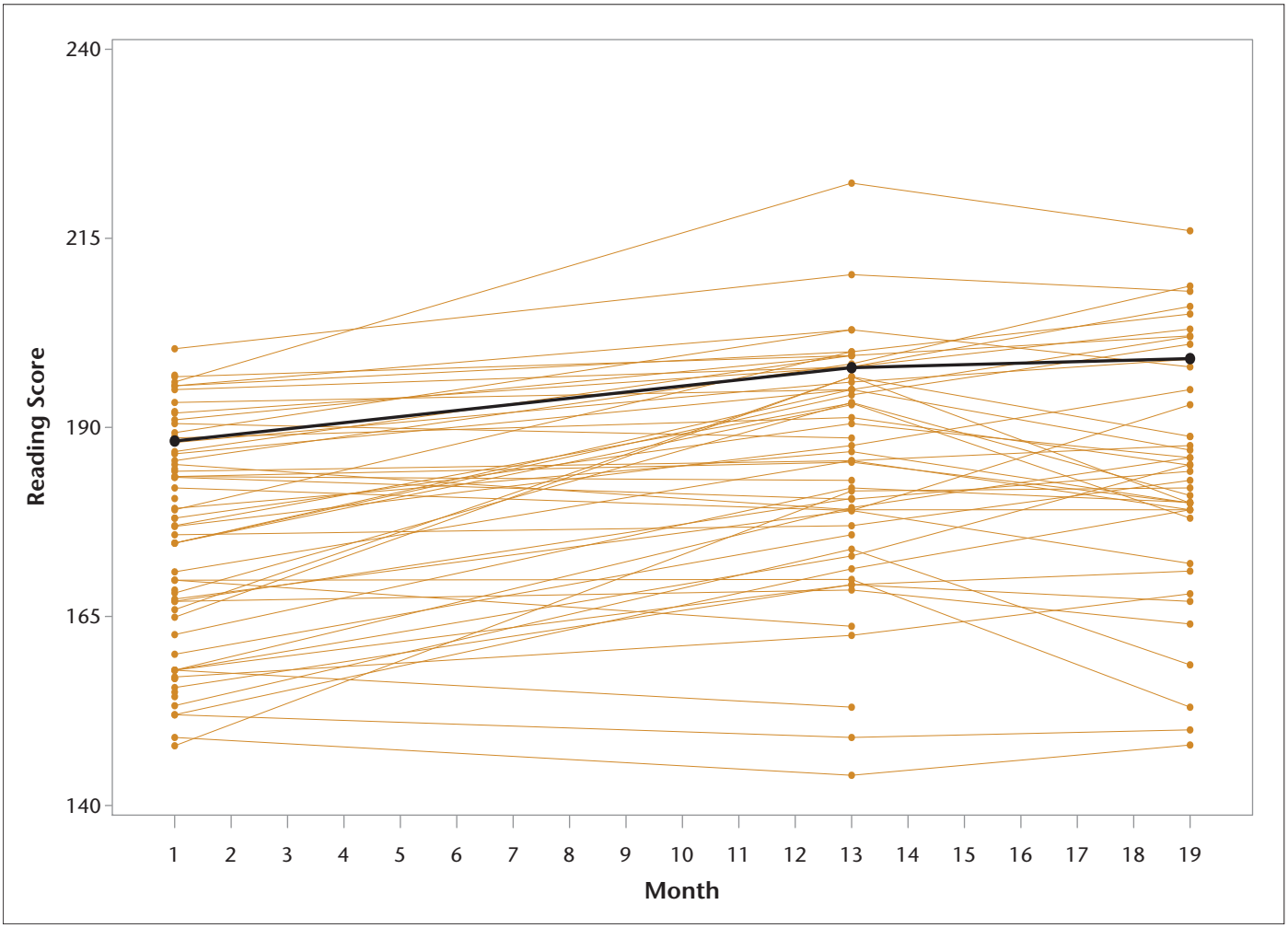
These data indicate that substantial numbers of "high-risk" HHM children are doing well in MPS, testing near or above national norms, while others are doing quite poorly, with low initial scores below the national average, and essentially no growth over time. The large differences observed among individuals in achievement levels could not be fully or consistently explained by differences in school enrollment data factors, such as gender or attendance. So what could account for the striking differences in achievement among individual HHM children?

Protective Factors for School Success in Homeless and Highly Mobile Students

Our second study attempted to identify key factors that may relate to differences in achievement observed in HHM children by examining a smaller set of sheltered children's school performance and behavior. Table 2 provides descriptive information about the families and children who participated. If two parenting adults were present in the shelter, both parents were invited to participate (30% of the families had two parenting adults). More fathers were living in the shelter with children and participated in this survey than we had seen in earlier studies. Also quite striking in interviewing the parents was the frequency of moving and homelessness in their own life histories.

Risk scores were calculated by summing well-established risk factors associated with school problems, such as a family headed by a single parent, low parental education, and a parent who was under 18 years of age at the birth of his/her first child. We expected that lower risk would predict better transitions to school. The study data supported this hypothesis, as we found that the lower the level of risk based on data factors reported by parents, the better the achievement and behavior at school (Figures 4a and b).

Figures 3a and 3b. Variation in NALT Reading and Math Test Scores for Individual HHM Students Tested in Spring 2004



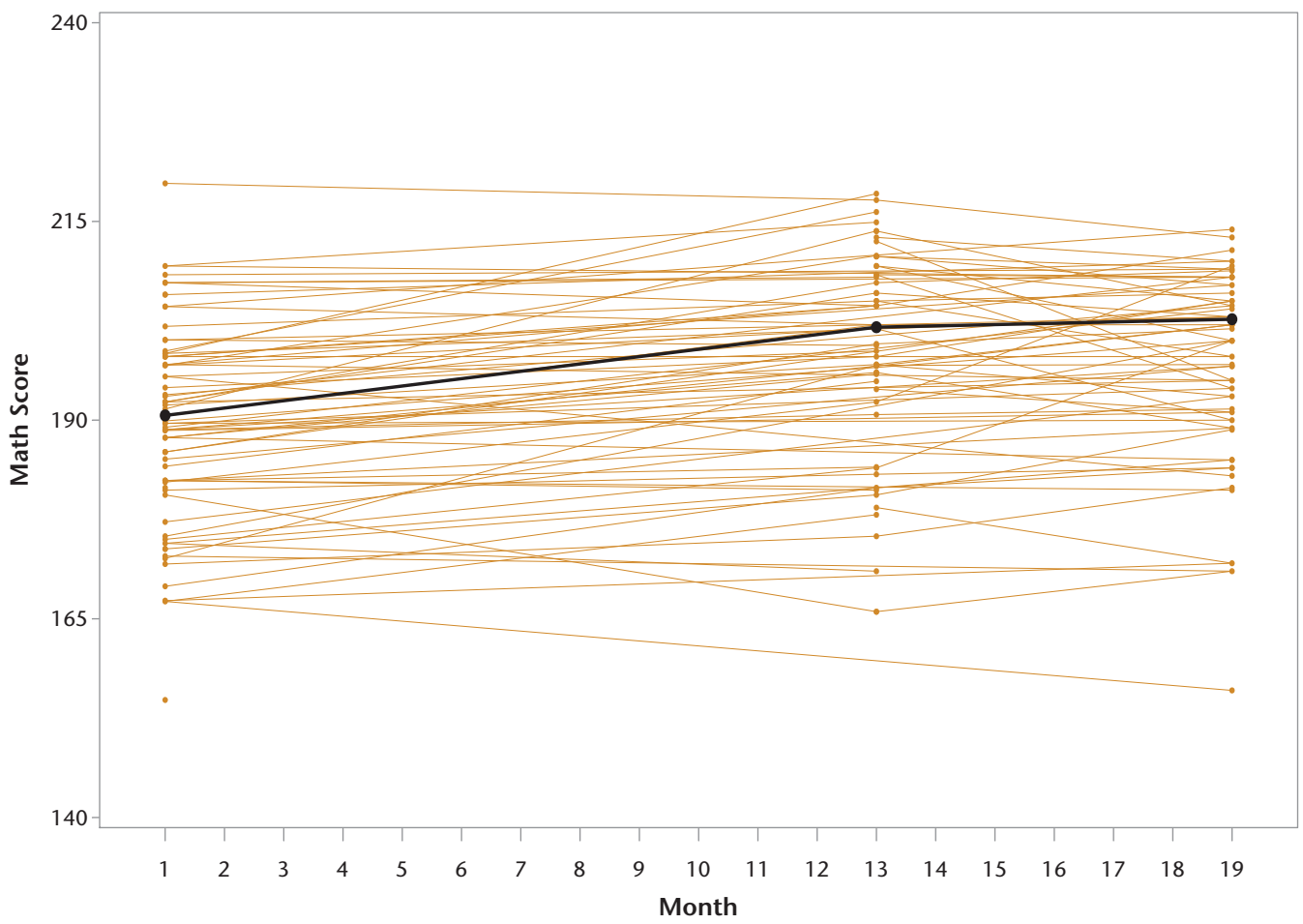
Note: Connected dots indicate scores for the same student (if available) tested again in spring 2005 and fall 2005. Data represent a random selection of 33% (66 students for reading, 64 for math) of the second graders tested in the spring of 2004. National averages for each test administration are shown in black.

People Serving People Children's Center

A unique partnership of collaborators from People Serving People, the University of Minnesota, and the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) has worked together for more than two years to establish an innovative "Children's Center" on site at People Serving People. The goal is to create a model learning center that provides state-of-the-art practices, training, and knowledge to promote positive child development and offer support to parents in homeless and highly mobile families. The center was developed with the combined expertise of experienced staff at People Serving People and MPS, as well as teachers and researchers from the University. The team included teachers from the Shirley G. Moore Laboratory School. Founded in 1925, it is one of the oldest and finest preschool training programs in the United States. Two of the Lab School's most experienced teachers, Victoria Barker and Frances Durkin, were enlisted to develop the project, with the support of the University's Institute of Child Development and College of Education and Human Development. Working closely with Jim Minor, CEO and president of People Serving People, and Kelly Stillman, director of children and family programming, these dynamic teachers guided the licensure and implementation of the new program for preschoolers and their parents. Plans are under way to train early childhood teachers at this unique site and to continue the University-community collaboration that led to its establishment, so that a strong bidirectional bridge is maintained. Programs for families at the People Serving People Children's Center will be informed by ongoing research, and research will be informed by real-world experience. More information on the Children's Center and other programs at People Serving People can be found at peopleservingpeople.org.

(Figures 3a and 3b, continued)

(b)



Note: Connected dots indicate scores for the same student (if available) tested again in spring 2005 and fall 2005. Data represent a random selection of 33% (66 students for reading, 64 for math) of the second graders tested in the spring of 2004. National averages for each test administration are shown in black.

As we expected from earlier studies, parenting quality also predicted school outcomes (Figures 4c and d). Based on the parent interviews, parents were rated on warmth, involvement, and structure provided to the child. Parenting quality predicted teacher reports of the child's academic achievement and behavior, as well as how well the child was getting along with peers and the teacher.

Evaluation of the tasks measuring self-regulation skills (executive function) in children worked well in the shelter, demonstrating that such assessments can be moved out of the lab and into the real world of the child. We found that a higher composite score on executive function tasks was related to good parenting and to school success, as we hypothesized. When executive function scores were higher, children had better academic performance and behavior in school as reported by teachers (Figures 4e and f). Even when we controlled for other factors (such as parenting and general intellectual skills), these self-regulation skills remained uniquely predictive of success in school.[3]

Children who performed well on self-regulation tasks also showed lower overall levels of the physiological stress hormone cortisol during the assessments. Furthermore, children who had experienced more stressful life experiences showed higher levels of cortisol, which suggests that stress in early childhood may influence how children respond physiologically as well as behaviorally to later challenges. These findings are consistent with data suggesting a link between better stress regulation, good care, and better cognitive performance among children who have experienced high levels of adversity in early childhood.

Table 2. Characteristics of HHM Families in the Study of Protective Factors for School Success

Characteristic	Number or Percentage
Length of current episode of homelessness	
< 1 month	58%
1–3 months	23%
> 3–12 months	12%
> 1 year	7%
Prior residence	
Own home/apartment	40%
Stayed with friends/relatives	45%
Shelter	15%
Parent homeless before	47%
As an adult	38%
As a child	15%
Parent has no high school degree	26%
Parent is currently employed	10%
Children with family in shelter	
Average number of children	3
Families with 4 or more children	33%
Child's lifetime stressful experiences	
A parent has been incarcerated	36%
Child lived in a foster home	7%
Child witnessed violence	35%

Notes: Number of families *(N)* = 58. Parent refers to the child's primary caregiver.

Implications and Future Directions

Results of our research to date indicate both high general risk for school problems among homeless and highly mobile children and also great variability in how well they are doing. We observed large gaps between more- and less-advantaged students, with HHM students already at high risk for lower achievement by second grade, the youngest grade tested with the achievement instrument we have focused on here. Many studies of disadvantaged children have documented achievement-related gaps, beginning before children enter school. Our findings are unique in the focus on HHM students, who appear to have even greater risk overall than low-income students who are residentially more stable. Moreover, large numbers of children fall into the HHM category in the Minneapolis Public Schools. These data all combine to suggest that addressing achievement gaps in districts like Minneapolis will require attention to the needs of homeless and highly mobile children and a keen awareness of the wide variation in those needs.

Calls for action to address disparities in education, health, and welfare of low-income children and their families have intensified in recent years, with a new emphasis on the return of public investments in early child development.[4] From a public policy perspective, it is important that these efforts include programs aimed at homeless and highly mobile children and their families. Special attention needs to be given to the unique barriers that mobility may present for inclusion. Clearly, national and local efforts to prevent homelessness or increase affordable housing are important for policy makers aiming to improve the odds of success for homeless children. Beyond systemwide efforts to limit homelessness and related risks, as well as those to increase residential

[3] Findings on executive functions in this article are drawn in part from the doctoral dissertation of Jelena Obradović, "The Mechanisms Underlying Adaptive Functioning of Homeless Children: The Role of Effortful Control" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2007).

[4] Examples include the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine volume, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* (edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, National Academy Press, 2000) and the recent National Conference of the Early Childhood Research Collaborative held at the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis (earlychildhoodrc.org/events/dec07conference.cfm).

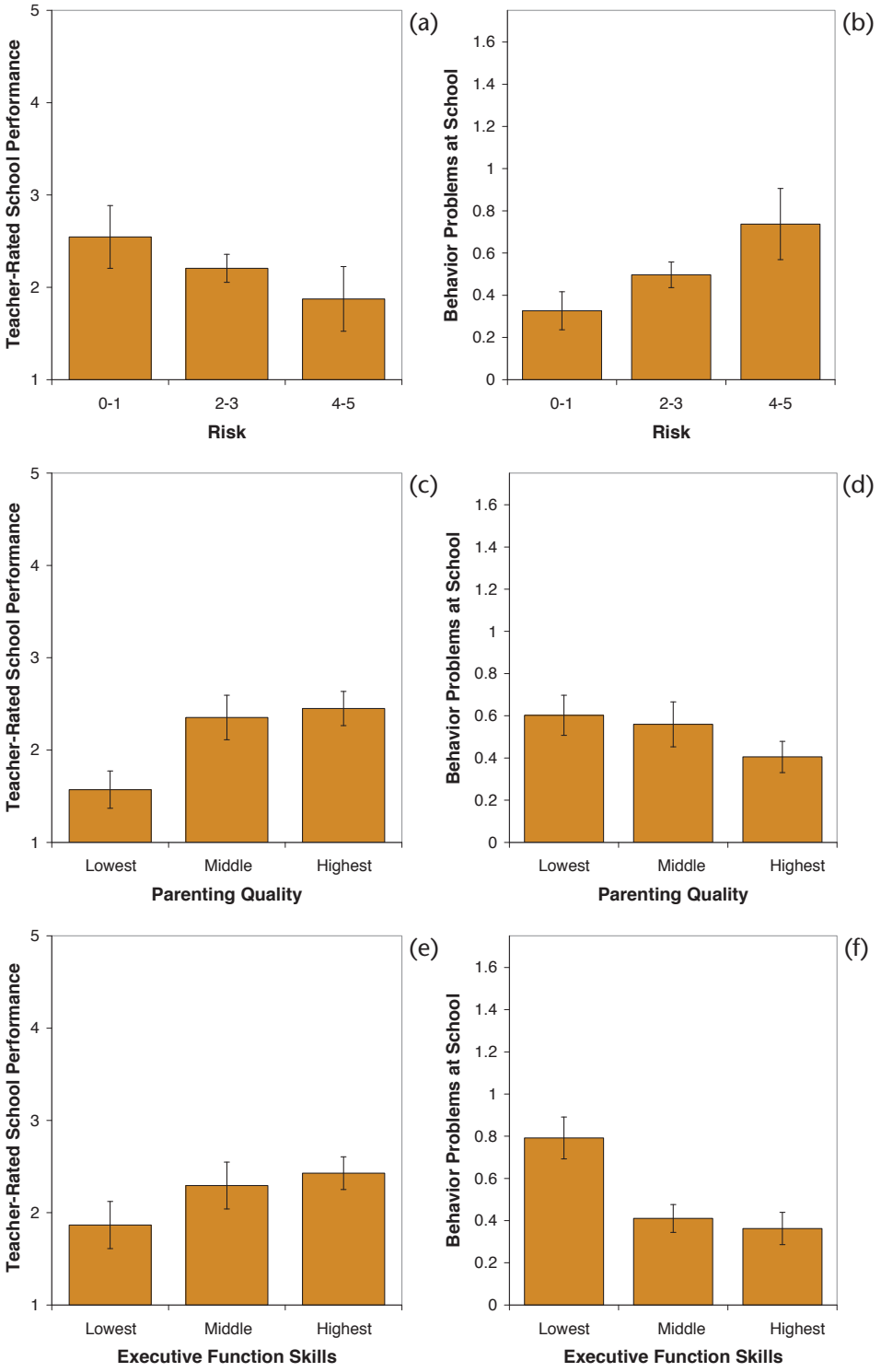
stability and opportunities, there is need for interventions directed at the individual, family, and school levels, particularly efforts that focus on positive development and promote resilience.

Research linking early experience, brain development, and behavior is an exciting frontier of developmental science that holds great promise for informing community and school programs to reshape and hone the tools children need for success in school. Results from our pilot research on promotive and protective factors in HHM children provide intriguing additional leads for prevention strategies. This work will need to be expanded and replicated, but our initial findings are congruent with other studies of disadvantaged children pointing to self-regulation abilities and parenting skills as targets for interventions to enhance educational success. Moreover, there are promising educational curricula that target self-regulation skills in young children (e.g., "Tools of the Mind," "PATHS") and interventions designed to enhance parenting skills (e.g., "The Incredible Years" and "Parenting through Change") that may prove to be effective for HHM, especially if mobility issues can be addressed at the same time. Full access to screening and programs that enhance learning skills for children may require changes in policies and systems of outreach, program delivery, and student tracking to meet the needs of HHM children and families at risk for residential mobility.

In all these efforts to improve the odds for academic success among HHM children, it is important to keep in mind the dramatic diversity we observed. Some HHM children manifest remarkable resilience, and many of these children have academic talents. Some individual children may simply need opportunities to enrich and fully develop their academic potential.

Finally, these projects have underscored the power of collaboration and the advantages of a focus on resilience in disadvantaged children. Our work was feasible *only* because we developed these projects in a University-community team that planned the studies together and knew the families, schools, and shelter systems very well. The positive focus of our work has elicited remarkable participation from parents, as well as teachers and principals. This collaboration and support convinced us that we are on the right track, but there is much to be done. We are currently engaged in applying for

Figures 4a–f. School Adjustment Scores for Indicators of Risk Levels or Protections for a Sample of 54 Kindergarten or First-Grade Children in a Homeless Shelter



Note: Student academic performance was rated on a 5-point scale by teachers (where 1 = "poor; well below grade level," 3 = "satisfactory; at grade level," and 5 = "excellent; well above grade level"). Behavior problem scores reflect a composite of the teachers' ratings of misbehavior in school, including aggressive, inattentive, or disruptive behavior (e.g., "Can't concentrate, can't pay attention for long," where 0 = never or not true, 1 = sometimes or somewhat true, 2 = often or very true). Figures 4a and 4b show mean school adjustment for three risk groups. Risk scores represent the number of risk factors present in each child's life: single-parent household; four or more children in the family; primary parent has no high school degree; parent is unemployed; and/or parent had his/her first child before the age of 18. Figures 4c and 4d show school adjustment in relation to three levels of parenting quality in the sample (for children whose parents were in the lowest third, middle third, and highest third on a composite rating of parental warmth, structure, and involvement). Figures 4e and 4f show school adjustment as a function of three levels of executive function skills demonstrated by the children (the lowest third, middle third, and highest third based on a composite score on self-regulation tasks). Error bars are shown for each mean score to indicate the standard error.

A Place to Learn

Mary's Place, built and operated with private donations and the inspiring vision of Mary Jo Copeland, is one of the two largest family shelters in Minneapolis. Named after and dedicated to the Blessed Mother Mary, Mary's Place has 92 family apartments that house more than 500 children and parents nightly. The first floor has two large, colorful classrooms where children flock to learn. During the school year, Mary's Place operates a tutoring program staffed with volunteers, who work one-on-one with children after each school day. During the summer, there is a reading program, where children come to practice their reading. Each child reads to a volunteer, who notes his or her progress, helps with tricky words, and discusses the story. Children eagerly line up at the door when it is time to read, often waiting for a turn with a volunteer. Some of the children are immigrants learning a new language at the same time they tackle the challenge of homework and learning to read. Mary's Place relies on many students from local colleges and universities, as well as dedicated community volunteers, to support the children's learning. More information on programs for children at Mary's Place can be found at sharingandcaringhands.org.

grants, developing interventions, and analyzing additional data. Based on our pilot data, we have received funding from the National Science Foundation to expand our study of school success in HHM children. We continue the search for evidence to guide policies and practices aimed at promoting school success in homeless and highly mobile children. We all have a stake in the future of homeless and other high-risk children in our communities.

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Research and volunteer activities involving University of Minnesota faculty and students are under way at Mary's Place, one of two large shelters in Minneapolis housing homeless families. Students like Shellena Eskridge, pictured above, volunteer as tutors during the school year and for the summer reading program.

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