

COVID-19 CHECKLIST FOR STATE EDUCATION LEADERS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



For children and youth experiencing homelessness, school is the safest and most stable part of their lives. Often, school is their only safety net, offering food, health and mental health services, caring adults, and the education that is their best hope of escaping homelessness as adults. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are disproportionately likely to have special needs and to be Hispanic or African American.[1] Homelessness has a negative impact on academic achievement that is over and above poverty. In 2017-2018, the national average high school graduation rate for homeless students was 67.8% – 10% below other low-income students.[2]

1.5 MILLION

Number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the 2017-18 school year.

1.4 MILLION

Number of children under age six experiencing homelessness.

87% MORE LIKELY

Children and youth experiencing homelessness are 87% more likely to drop out of school than their housed peers.[3]

In some states, state educational agency (SEA) leaders, including McKinney-Vento State Coordinators, have been asked to review local educational agency (LEA) plans for responding to school closures and COVID-19, to ensure these plans equitably and adequately address the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness. At the same time, LEA McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons are seeking guidance from SEAs on uses of funds, flexibility in budgeting and spending deadlines, and strategies to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness for the rest of this school year, over the summer, and at the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

SchoolHouse Connection offers this checklist of important considerations for SEA leaders to keep in mind as they review LEA plans, produce guidance for LEAs, and target and use stimulus funding to meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

[1] SchoolHouse Connection (2019), Student Homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/student-homelessness-lessons-from-the-youth-risk-behavior-survey-yrbs/>

[2] NCES (2020). https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2017-18.asp

[3] Education Leads Home (2019), Snapshot on Student Homelessness.

<https://www.educationleadshome.org/2019/02/12/education-leads-home-releases-homeless-student-state-snapshots-2/>

OVERVIEW + CHECKLIST

#1 **Federal education laws are in full effect, with limited waivers available for certain fiscal, accountability, and assessment requirements.**

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Continued enrollment in school of origin
- Immediate enrollment

#2 **As part of the McKinney-Vento Act's mandates, SEAs and LEAs must ensure that students experiencing homelessness are able to participate fully in school activities, and that barriers to identification, enrollment, and retention in school are identified and removed.**

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Adequate capacity for McKinney-Vento liaisons
- Priority access to devices, internet connectivity, and emergency assistance (transportation, meals, pre-paid cell phones)
- Enhanced identification efforts during school closures

#3 **States should offer and encourage flexibility in the use of current funding to meet the new and different needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness at this unique time.**

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Reassess needs of students and young children who had been identified as homeless, as well as those who became homeless because of the pandemic
- Readjust Title I, Part A homeless set-aside for this school year and next, based on the needs assessment

#4 **As new funding from the CARES Act and additional federal relief bills flows into states, states should act to ensure some of that funding is targeted to meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.**

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- State/LEAs have set aside funds to meet the particular needs of students experiencing homelessness
- State/LEAs are raising awareness and coordinating with state and local housing agencies and Continuums of Care so students experiencing homelessness can access housing supports through new federal funding

#5 **As LEAs begin to plan for schools to reopen, whether during this school year or for the 2020-2021 school year, they must plan to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness.**

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Increased personnel to carry out liaison duties for this school year and next
- Increased mental health and wellness supports for students experiencing homelessness

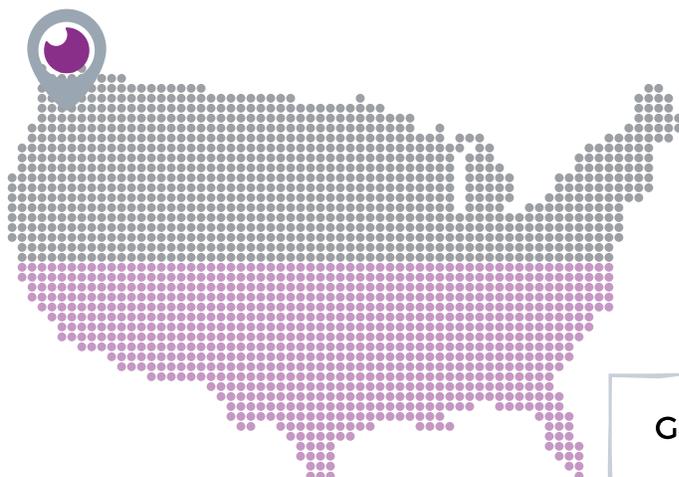
1. Federal education laws are in full effect, with limited waivers available for certain fiscal, accountability, and assessment requirements.

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Continued enrollment in school of origin
- Immediate enrollment

It is important to ensure that LEAs continue to implement all of the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements, even where school closures may alter how those requirements are carried out. For example, students who are McKinney-Vento eligible continue to have the right to immediate enrollment, and to remain in their school of origin, consistent with their best interests. If a student moves to a homeless situation in a different school district, the student can continue to participate in distance learning provided by the original school.

Washington



Guidance from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction notes: “During times of school building closure, districts are reminded that all of the protections of the federal McKinney-Vento Act remain in place.”[4]

[4] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2020), Continuous Learning 2020, page 38. <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/OSPI%20Publication%20-%20Continuous%20Learning%202020.pdf>

2. As part of the McKinney-Vento Act’s mandates, SEAs and LEAs must ensure that students experiencing homelessness are able to participate fully in school activities, and that barriers to identification, enrollment, and retention in school are identified and removed. [5]

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Adequate capacity for McKinney-Vento liaisons
- Priority access to devices, internet connectivity, and emergency assistance (transportation, meals, pre-paid cell phones)
- Enhanced identification efforts during school closures

With schools closed, “school activities” look different than usual. During school closures, these activities may consist of video conferences or online classes with teachers; receiving, completing, and returning paper packets; and receiving school meals. Whether participation in these activities is required or voluntary, the needs of students who are protected by McKinney-Vento must be assessed and addressed to ensure that they can participate fully, considering their mobility, lack of transportation, and other challenges. That might include providing them with devices and internet connectivity; giving gas vouchers for them to travel to pick up meals and schoolwork or drop off completed assignments; or delivering meals and assignments to where students are staying. It also likely means ensuring families and youth have a way to stay in touch with the liaison, teachers, counselors, and others, by providing pre-paid cell phones or other tools to keep connected despite frequent moves and school closures.

LEA plans also must specifically address and remove barriers faced by McKinney-Vento students, including barriers to identifying newly homeless students. Identification strategies must accommodate school closures through outreach such as posting information about McKinney-Vento eligibility and services on school and LEA websites and social media; sharing flyers and posters about McKinney-Vento services and points of contact with motels and campgrounds; providing information about meal distribution sites; asking teachers to mention homelessness (in non-stigmatizing language) and available services during distance learning; and ensuring online enrollment processes ask about loss of housing in understandable language and include enrollment options for families and youth without internet connectivity.

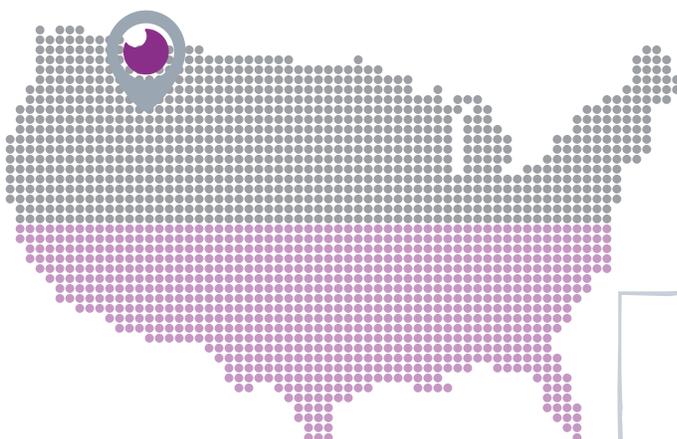
[5] 42 USC §§11432(g)(3)(C), 11434a(1), 11432(g)(1)(I).



LIAISONS MUST BE "ABLE TO" CARRY OUT THE TEN DUTIES SPECIFIED IN THE LAW.

Liaisons are legally responsible for implementing the McKinney-Vento Act in their LEAs; under the Act, they must be “able to” carry out the ten duties specified in the law.[6] Their legal responsibilities make them essential personnel during school closures and stay at home orders. In light of increasing needs, LEAs can use Title I, Part A and other funds to increase liaisons’ dedicated time on McKinney-Vento duties or increase support from other personnel whose jobs include supporting students experiencing homelessness, such as attendance officers, counselors, and social workers.

Idaho



In **Idaho**, the McKinney-Vento State Coordinator has recommended that districts increase the percent of time liaisons spend on their McKinney-Vento duties, either by reducing their other duties, adding a stipend to liaison salaries, or contracting paraprofessional or social work staff to assist with communication and outreach.

[6] 42 U.S.C. §§11432(g)(1)(J)(ii), 11432(g)(6)(A).

3. States should offer and encourage flexibility in the use of current funding to meet the new and different needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness at this unique time.

What to look for in LEA Plans with regard to students experiencing homelessness:

- Reassess needs of students and young children who had been identified as homeless, as well as those who became homeless because of the pandemic
- Readjust Title I, Part A homeless set-aside for this school year and next, based on the needs assessment

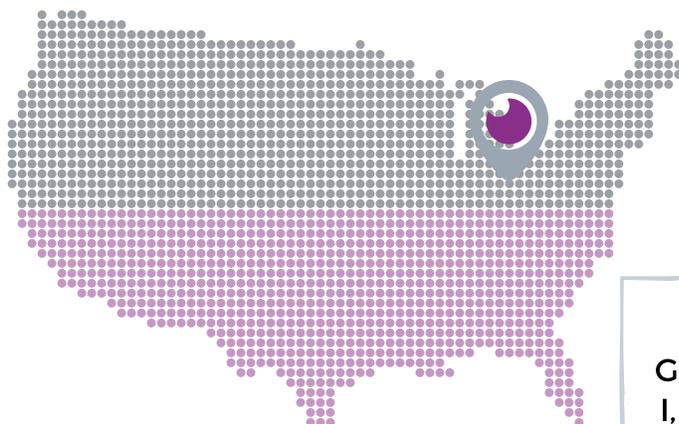
The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is offering several funding flexibilities to help LEAs respond to COVID-19 and school closures, including allowing LEAs to carry over more than 15% of their FY 2019 Title I, Part A funds into FY 2020 (to be used after September 30, 2020), and extending the availability of FY 2018 Title I, Part A and McKinney-Vento funds (among others) until September 30, 2021. States can request these waivers from ED and encourage LEAs to take advantage of them.

In addition, states should encourage LEAs to view McKinney-Vento students' needs broadly and use both McKinney-Vento and Title I, Part A funds creatively to meet them. All LEAs receiving Title I, Part A funds must reserve funds to provide educationally related support services to children and youth experiencing homelessness, in both Title I and non-Title I schools.[7] The amount of the reservation can be determined based on a needs assessment.[8] Given the drastic recent changes in students' needs, in most LEAs the previous amount of Title I, Part A funds reserved for children and youth experiencing homelessness is likely to be insufficient. States can encourage LEAs to re-evaluate the needs both of currently homeless students, as well those who lose their housing due to job loss and family conflict caused by quarantines. The needs of young children under age six also must be considered. Title I, Part A set-asides for the rest of this school year and into next year should be adjusted to meet increasing needs.

[7] 20 U.S.C. §6313(c)(3)(A); U.S. Department of Education (August 2018), Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance, M-5a. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/legislation.html>

[8] 20 U.S.C. §§6313(c)(3)(B) and (C)(i). U.S. Department of Education, M-6.

Ohio



The Ohio Department of Education’s Guidance urges LEAs to increase their Title I, Part A homeless set-asides immediately: “Given the level of need of homeless students during the ordered school-building closure, districts are encouraged to exercise discretion to increase the amount of Title I funds set aside for homeless students.” [9]

As LEAs seek to adjust their budgets, states should create streamlined processes for LEAs to request budget revisions, and approve revisions quickly. As long as budget requests align with allowable uses of McKinney-Vento funds[10] or Title I, Part A funds[11] in the current context, they can be approved. Under Title I, Part A specifically, services that are not typically provided with such funds are allowable, as long as they are assisting homeless students to take advantage of educational opportunities, and are not “reasonably available” from other public or private sources. In the context of the coronavirus, many public or private organizations that used to provide assistance are no longer able to do so, making McKinney-Vento and Title I, Part A funds even more essential for students experiencing homelessness. States can serve as a hub for information on additional services and service coordination among federal programs and LEAs.

[9] Ohio Department of Education (2020), District and State Support for Homeless Students During Ordered School-Building Closure. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Student-Supports/Coronavirus/District-and-State-Support-for-Homeless-Students-D>

[10] 42 U.S.C. §11433(d). <https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/TextofMV.pdf>

[11] U.S. Department of Education, M-4.

4. As new funding from the CARES Act and additional federal relief bills flows into states, states should act to ensure some of that funding is targeted to meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

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The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) included an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund for SEAs and LEAs, based on the Title I, Part A formula. Allowable uses of funds specifically include activities authorized under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, and activities to address the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness, including how outreach and service delivery will meet their needs. In allocating funds to LEAs, states should require an amount, percentage, or needs-based set-aside for students experiencing homelessness to align with the current homeless reservation requirements for Title I, Part A. The reservation will help ensure that outreach, services, and supplies reach these highly mobile and vulnerable students. Additional supplemental funding also should be targeted to ensure educational equity for McKinney-Vento students, as well as to ensure capacity to meet the needs of newly homeless students over the spring, summer, and fall.

State education leaders also should inform state housing and homeless assistance agencies of the emergency and transitional housing needs liaisons observe among their students and families. The CARES Act provided \$4 billion in Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding to support housing and other needs of people experiencing homelessness or “at risk” of homelessness. State and local education leaders have an important role to inform agencies receiving ESG funds about the scale and severity of the emergency housing needs of families and youth identified by public schools, and urge those agencies to reserve appropriate amounts of ESG funding to meet their needs.

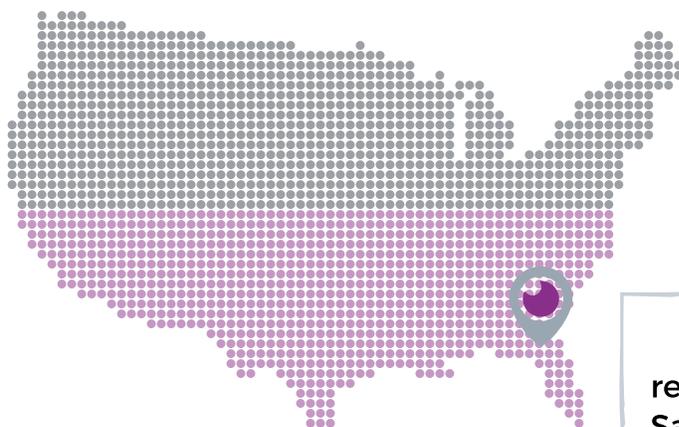
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Reports from liaisons across the country indicate that child and youth homelessness is increasing dramatically as a result of the economic stressors of COVID-19. LEAs will need plans to identify McKinney-Vento students, ensure their immediate enrollment, and put appropriate services in place for them. It is likely that additional personnel capacity will be necessary, not only for liaisons, but also for transportation departments, school counselors, and social workers. Additional mental health support for students and staff also may be necessary, as communities strive to adjust to life after COVID-19.

Florida



Florida is allowing school districts to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from the Safe Schools and Mental Health allocations to virtual and telephonic mental health counseling services for students who need emotional support due to COVID-19.



SchoolHouse Connection is a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth. We believe education is the only permanent solution to homelessness. Our vision is that children and youth experiencing homelessness have full access to quality learning, birth through higher education, so they will never be homeless as adults, and the next generation will never be homeless.

www.schoolhouseconnection.org