2020-21 STATE INITIATIVES ON STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

PROGRESS TO DATE
Data show that students experiencing homelessness have among the lowest high school graduation rates of any student population – the result of mobility, invisibility, and multiple traumas beyond the lack of housing. Failing to receive a high school diploma makes it far more likely for these students to continue to experience homelessness in the future, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and housing instability. The adverse impacts of homelessness begin in early childhood, and continue as barriers to postsecondary access and completion. As more data becomes available about homeless students’ educational participation and outcomes, it is essential that this vulnerable population is intentionally embedded in action plans and dedicated resources to increase educational opportunity and equity.

To meet this need, Education Leads Home (ELH) was launched in 2018. ELH is a national initiative coordinated by SchoolHouse Connection focused on improving educational and life outcomes for children and youth who experience homelessness. **ELH’s vision is a long-term, permanent reduction in homelessness through increased educational attainment.** The initiative seeks to raise awareness of key challenges and increase implementation of proven practices and policies that improve educational outcomes, from early childhood through postsecondary, for one of the country’s most vulnerable student populations.
The campaign has set three ambitious goals for supporting children and youth experiencing homelessness:

- By 2026, young children experiencing homelessness will participate in quality early childhood programs at the same rate as their housed peers.
- A 90% high school graduation rate for homeless students by 2030.
- A 60% postsecondary attainment rate for homeless students by 2034.

ELH seeks to meet these goals by supporting teams of state leaders, including state educational agency homeless coordinators, Head Start State Collaboration Offices, institutions of higher education, advocates, and homeless service providers. SchoolHouse Connection facilitates and provides support to state teams through:

- **Mini-grants.** During the 2020-2021 school year, the ELH initiative awarded mini-grants to 12 state teams to build the work within their state; [1]
- **Customized strategic support,** including bi-monthly state team check-in calls, goal-setting, and customized action roadmaps;
- **A monthly community of practice** virtual session which convened all state teams and centered on real-world problems of practice and peer troubleshooting.

SHC is proud of the progress made to date by state teams, which are summarized in the snapshots below.

[1] Participation in the ELH Community of Practice is open to any state who wishes to join, there is no requirement to be a grantee. Some states indicated that they did not have the capacity to manage a mini-grant, but would still benefit from participation in the Community of Practice.
The Team

Public Service Faculty, EMBARK, Kennesaw State University

ELH Goals:

- Strengthen connections between Single Points Of Contact (SPOCs) on college campuses and McKinney-Vento school district homeless liaisons to support resource sharing across age groups.
- Ensure that high school students experiencing homelessness have access to information and resources for applying and successfully transitioning to postsecondary education.

With support from ELH, the Georgia team hosted the EMBARK conference May 24-26, 2021, with 226 participants from K12 and higher education systems. The first day of the conference focused on statewide strategies and successes, the second day focused on national best practices, and the third day focused on research and promising practices. More information about the conference is available online on the EMBARK website. The Georgia team used the EMBARK conference to establish a plan for sustaining this work across institutions within the state.

“Embark continues to be positioned as an important networking relationship serving this population, and [the Georgia ELH team] is making plans to replicate this model in other regions of the state in the months to come.”
The Team

State Educational Agency Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Head Start Program Specialist

ELH Goals:

- To create a tool that will help homeless education liaisons identify and meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness with younger siblings (birth to five).

Building on a previous early childhood needs assessment that was supported by the ELH mini-grant, the Hawaii team developed an early childhood toolkit to help liaisons identify family needs related to young children (birth to five) and connect them to community resources. As a result of this continued work, the Hawaii team is working to establish a statewide early childhood homelessness data dashboard, as well as working across early childhood and K12 systems to develop a better referral system for ensuring children experiencing homelessness are enrolled in a high-quality program.
The Team

State Educational Agency Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, State Head Start Collaboration Director, School on Wheels

ELH Goals:

- Conduct an evaluation of pre-K enrollment of McKinney-Vento eligible families in Indiana;
- Develop guidance for case management in the area of early childhood and pre-K access;
- Work to bridge various statewide initiatives working to address educational outcomes for homeless children and youth.

The Indiana team used their ELH mini-grant funds to hire a consultant who produced an evaluation of McKinney-Vento eligible families enrolled in pre-K across the state. The evaluation revealed enrollment rates for Head Start, Child Care, and state-funded pre-K programs, as well as gaps in data on young children experiencing homelessness. Next steps will include identifying barriers to enrollment and developing an action plan.

The project activity that was the most successful was to convene agencies and community partners throughout the state to attend informational sessions to 1) share our findings and 2) request that key stakeholders identify others in the area of education and child services so that we could hear from them regarding resources, data, and best practices. The team was encouraged by the potential cross-sector collaboration between agencies like the Division of Family Resources, Office of Early Childhood & Out of School Learning, Early Learning Indiana, Department of Child Services, First Steps, Commission on Improving the Status of Children etc.
The Team

Local Educational Agency Homeless Liaisons, Preschool Director, Early Learning Connector and Family Resource Coordinator from Covington School District and Erlanger-Elsmere Schools

ELH Goals:

- To enhance and provide educational materials to all community members, shelters and service agencies to assist in the identification of early learners, ages 2-5 years old, experiencing homelessness.
- 100% of the McKinney-Vento early learners identified will receive assistance from district staff on available programs for enrollment.
- Provide in-person or on-line family engagement events hosted by district staff.
- Provide internet service at no cost for families in need.

In addition to monthly team meetings to share information about McKinney-Vento best practices, district teams worked with preschool social workers to streamline the identification and enrollment process for children experiencing homelessness. District kindergarten readiness teams have updated their materials about homelessness, and the ELH team met with local service providers to ask for their assistance in identifying students with housing instability and have provided them with McKinney-Vento Regional Brochures. The team has also hosted on-line information sessions with preschools teams during their “check and connect” events with families.
NEVADA

The Team
State Educational Agency Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, StateTitle I Director/Federal Liaison

ELH Goals:
- To increase postsecondary attainment for students experiencing homelessness by creating a position for a student with lived experience to advise the Nevada Department of Education.

In partnership with the University of Nevada Las Vegas, the Nevada team used their ELH funds to provide a stipend for an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth intern within the State Educational Agency. You can read more about Nevada’s SEA intern Theresa Butler here, Nevada plans to make this position permanent to ensure the voices of those with lived experience are part of internal decisions.

NEW YORK

The Team
Young Invincibles New York, Youth from CUNY Fatherhood Academy, Advocates for Children

ELH Goals:
- To increase the postsecondary attainment rate of students experiencing homelessness through student-led advocacy, support for basic needs, and legislative opportunities.

Young Invincibles (YI) staff testified at the NYS Joint Standing Committee on Higher Education. Staff member Melanie Kruvelis’ testimony and Zaret’s testimony at the hearing provided insight into the impact of COVID-19 on higher education institutions, students, faculty, and staff. YI also developed a 2021 statewide higher education policy agenda that includes the creation of an on-campus homeless liaison position within public higher education institutions. And in March 2021, more than 40 Young Advocates and other college students met with approximately 30 New York State legislators during #StudentsTakeAlbany Advocacy Day.
# NORTH CAROLINA

## The Team

State Educational Agency Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Child Care Services Association, Community Shelter, North Carolina State University

### ELH Goals:

- To develop an early childhood tool for shelters to use when caring for young children experiencing homelessness.
- North Carolina post-secondary institutions will have an updated list of Single Points Of Contact (SPOCs) for youth experiencing homelessness, and an infrastructure for support for SPOCs across campuses.

With support from ELH, the NC team was able to host joint learning sessions across the early childhood and housing communities, as well as adapt a shelter assessment tool for shelters to better understand and meet the needs of young children experiencing homelessness. Funds were also used to support the strategic planning process of Yay Babies, the statewide coalition of early childhood and homelessness providers. Additionally, the higher ed team updated the list of SPOCs for youth experiencing homelessness across NC colleges and universities, and conducted a survey of 103 SPOCs. Among the findings, the survey revealed that 65.2% of respondents’ contact information is not available on their university of college website as the liaison/point of contact for students experiencing homelessness.

"The SPOC survey was very successful. It allowed for a workgroup to develop a tool that will be used for future statewide professional development. There is now a compilation of professional development plans."
NORTH DAKOTA

The Team
Youth Works, North Dakota University System, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction

ELH Goals:
- To increase the postsecondary attainment rate for students experiencing homelessness by better identifying and assisting students experiencing homelessness on North Dakota college campuses.

North Dakota established a pilot program with Bismarck State College to identify and support homeless college students. The collaborative involves Runaway and Homeless Youth providers, McKinney-Vento school district homeless liaisons, and Chaffee Independent Living providers. Plans are underway to expand to North Dakota State University in the Fall of 2021.

OREGON

The Team
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, State Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Coordinator

ELH Goals:
- To increase youth participation in the host home network;
- To create area-specific partnerships, ensuring that all regions of the state are represented;
- To create messaging to use for inviting and recruiting organizations to join the network.

The Oregon team, led by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, successfully created a network of 10 organizations who will be part of a host home network, providing safe housing options to Oregon’s unaccompanied youth who are in high school. They also were able to collaborate with the Oregon Department of Human Services to participate in a survey quantifying the need for more housing options for young people in Oregon. Ecumenical Ministries also engaged in learning with the Washington State host home network in order to deepen their goals and understanding of host homes. Lastly, the Oregon team successfully recruited two young people who will serve as advisors for the host home network. Ecumenical Ministries’ work to launch a host home network was featured in local media coverage earlier this year.
The Virginia team set the following goals across each area: early childhood, K12, and postsecondary:

- Virginia will have more comprehensive data regarding the number of children experiencing homelessness enrolled in early childhood programs across LEA/SEA administered programs and Head Start.
- The Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for students experiencing homelessness will increase to at least 69%.
- Virginia will have established partners and early metrics to monitor the participation in public post-secondary education (and private colleges) of students who experienced homelessness in high school.

The creation of a “Single Points Of Contact” state team provided professional development to interested universities. A lasting outcome of this work is the creation of more SPOCs across institutions statewide to support students experiencing homelessness, including in institutions that had never previously designated SPOCs. ELH funds were used to provide honorariums to young adults who presented during HOPE-sponsored training events and for the development of a Youth Engagement Toolkit created by young adults with lived experience, which will be released in the fall of 2021. An in-depth analysis of ACGR data revealed several patterns related to students experiencing homelessness who are English learners and students with disabilities, and the Virginia team will be conducting additional qualitative research to learn more. Virginia also included in their American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth plan the hiring of additional staff to support ELH goals longer term.
The Team

Building Changes

ELH Goals:

- To initiate a replicable demonstration project that created culturally and linguistically appropriate flyers with McKinney-Vento information for English Language Learners (ELL) families migrating from Spanish-speaking countries, Russian-speaking territories, and the Marshall Islands.
- Co-host workshops that draw the participation of district system advocates, education authorities, and ELL community members.

Building Changes completed and elevated their work in a number of ways. The School/Housing Network is a web-based peer-learning group of McKinney-Vento liaisons and community partners from across the state that continues to meet monthly, supported in part through the ELH grant. Culturally and linguistically appropriate flyers were disseminated widely in order to increase identification efforts across the state. Flyers were shared with 318 school superintendents, 80 members of the School/Housing Network, and hand-delivered to the Tukwila school district. The Washington ELH team responds to requests for meetings to discuss replicating the flyers project with other districts across the state (for example the Bellingham, Washington school District.) Building Changes will present steps to replicate the outreach project, as well as flyers, through five different technical assistance and training workshops across the state on behalf of the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2022.
The Team

State Educational Agency Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

ELH Goals:

- Develop curriculum for educator preparation programs to include information about educational rights under the McKinney-Vento Act, awareness of homelessness, and strategies for working with families and students.
- Connect public school district K-12 homeless liaisons to Wisconsin Technical Colleges System (WTCS) staff supporting students experiencing homelessness, with the goal of improving postsecondary attainment for students experiencing homelessness.
- Provide professional development opportunities to public school district K-12 homeless liaisons to increase awareness of programs and staff to help connect students to the technical college system with a goal of increasing enrollment and retention of students experiencing homelessness in WTCS schools.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has successfully established a partnership with the Wisconsin Technical Colleges System (WTCS) as a result of support from ELH. In the spring of 2021, DPI and WTCS co-hosted a webinar and shared information on transitioning to higher education for students experiencing homelessness. A panel of WTCS counselors and advisors from three different campuses and staff from a school district also shared how they worked to support students experiencing homelessness in transitioning to higher education. During this webinar, WTCS staff at other campuses and district homeless liaisons were able to make connections with each other to start their own partnerships. Additionally, a group of WTCS faculty and one district homeless liaison finalized curriculum on homelessness awareness and educational rights under the McKinney-Vento Act for the Foundations of Teacher Education program at WTCS. Next steps include creating a module and facilitator’s guide, and eventual introduction of the curriculum across all colleges and universities in Wisconsin.

“We are excited to be using the grant funds to pay individuals to create the curriculum and have it in a module format. We know this curriculum and information will be available going forward with little staff capacity needed. We see this as having the greatest impact at the state level. The Wisconsin team also has come to value the opportunity to meet and connect with one another. We anticipate these meetings continuing in the future as well as annual collaborative school homeless liaison/college staff virtual meetings on a topic of relevance and importance.”
While the goals and activities of the ELH state teams varied according to local need and interest, all teams made progress toward changing systems to improve outcomes through multi-sector collective action. This is the core lesson of the ELH state initiatives on student homelessness to date: **diverse perspectives and cross-agency involvement are the keys to driving action and improving outcomes.**

SHC will continue to highlight tools, resources, and insights from state teams throughout the 2021-2022 school year, including at our ELH2022 National Convening in March 2022 in Austin, Texas. At the same time, we will involve state teams as thought partners to inform our new strategic focus on leveraging the unprecedented resources on student homelessness made available through the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Fund to advance the goals of the ELH initiative.

SchoolHouse Connection is grateful to the Raikes Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation for continued support and partnership, and shared vision of education as a permanent pathway out of homelessness and into lifelong success.