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SchoolHouse  
Connection

## HOW TO USE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT K-12 EDUCATION FUNDS TO IDENTIFY AND SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



The [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARP\)](#), Congress' most recent package for COVID-19 relief provides nearly \$123 billion in aid for K-12 education through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), including [several reservations to support students experiencing homelessness and other marginalized student groups](#).

In addition to the \$123 billion in ESSER funds, ARP includes \$800 million in funding **specifically dedicated to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of children and youth experiencing homelessness**, including through wrap-around services. A summary of the timing, allocation, and uses of these funds is [here](#).

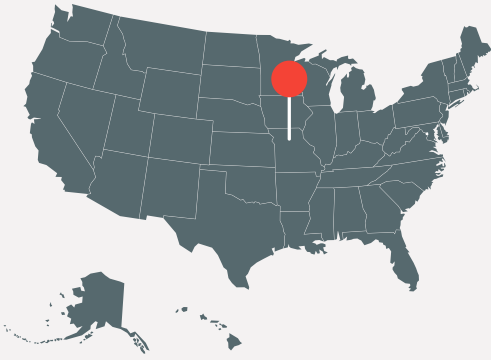
SEAs and LEAs should strategically use and leverage **both** ARP ESSER funds and dedicated homelessness funding to locate, engage, maintain connection, and support children and youth experiencing homelessness.

## HOW CAN STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES USE ARP FUNDS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

- Add capacity for Office of the State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth to:
  - Support LEAs in the identification and re-engagement of students experiencing homelessness, especially in LEAs that have not received subgrant funding.
  - Coordinate a “Have You Seen This Student” information system to track missing McKinney-Vento students who might have moved to another district within the state.
  - Establish and publicize a hotline with the capacity to respond to LEAs, parents, youth, and providers.
  - Launch a robust public outreach campaign to help reconnect families and youth experiencing homelessness to schools and early childhood programs, and inform them of their educational rights under the McKinney-Vento Act.
  - Coordinate with other state-level program offices to ensure funds are being maximized across various streams included in ARP, as well as with other state agencies (for example, early childhood, higher education, housing, and health care).

Center equity in ESSER funds decisions. Black, Latinx, Native American and Pacific Islander students are more likely to experience homelessness than White students; LGBTQ students also are more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual or cisgender students. Hire diverse outreach staff, translate all materials, and ensure cultural competence and sensitivity to the impacts of racism and trauma, as well as to the strengths of these populations, in outreach and service provision. Provide support for liaisons to understand the unique needs of students and families of color experiencing homelessness, including how to center anti-racist approaches in conversations and interactions with them.

## HOW CAN SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS USE ARP FUNDS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?



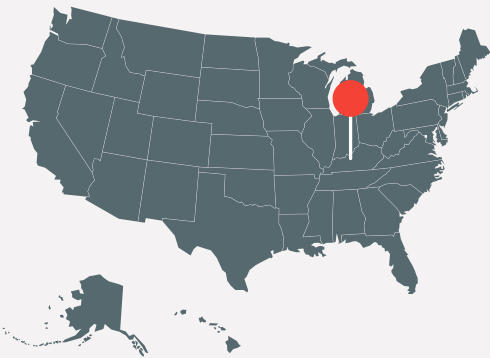
**Kansas City Public Schools in MO** purchased phones with one and two year contracts for McKinney-Vento high school seniors.

### 1. Increase outreach and identification by:

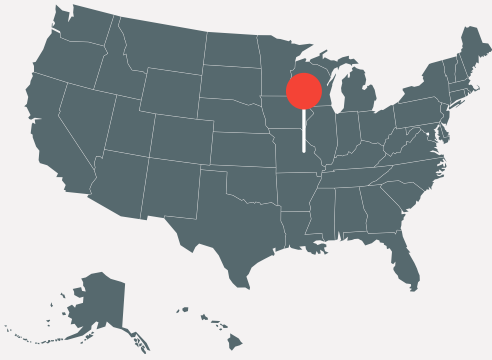
- Augmenting staff hours dedicated to McKinney-Vento liaison duties (use a [simple tool](#) to assess liaison capacity.)
- Hiring additional staff, or adding hours to staff specifically tasked with finding and re-engaging students.
- Launching a public mass marketing outreach campaign that includes targeted advertisements in places families and youth frequent such as grocery stores, public transportation and community services, as well as TV and radio advertisements.
- Screen for homelessness by embedding questions and information about homelessness in all school or district outreach efforts.
- Provide [training](#) to teachers, registrars, and other staff to assist with identification.

### 2. Enhance communication options with students and families.

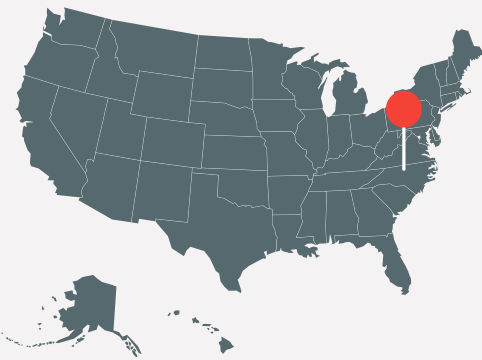
- Provide prepaid cell phones for youth and parents. Kansas City Public Schools purchased phones with one and two year contracts for McKinney-Vento high school seniors.
- Facilitate “affinity groups” for students to connect on platforms they use.
- Send small educationally-related care packages to students weekly or monthly to ensure they have what they need to attend and succeed in school, and to keep them engaged.
- Increase posters, [flyers](#), and other outreach throughout the community.
- Purchase and staff a vehicle for community outreach to motels, campgrounds, food banks and doubled-up students.



**Paducah Public Schools in KY** purchased a van with community donations, and the McKinney-Vento program has teamed up with school nutrition to provide school supplies, hygiene items and food.



**Confluence Academies Charter School in St. Louis, MO** set up virtual academy centers in school buildings and the community soon after buildings closed, providing transportation, meals, and teachers to help with distance learning.



**The Steve Smith Foundation in Charlotte, NC** set-up an in-person learning center for approximately 105 students experiencing homelessness in grades K-5. The Foundation works with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district to ensure all students receive meals, in addition to access to technology and support for learning.

### **3. Increase counseling and social work services.**

- Ensure counselors can assist McKinney-Vento students with credit accrual and recovery, FAFSA completion, and college transition.
- Hire or assign building-level “success coaches” for McKinney-Vento students

### **4. Hire “systems navigators” to help families and youth access education and other ARP services, such as shelter, utilities, housing and rental assistance, child care, Head Start, unemployment, and tax credits.**

- Help students and families meet basic needs like food, health care, masks, hygiene items, and laundry.
- When possible, hire parents and/or young people with lived experience to serve as systems navigators.

### **5. Provide academic coaching, in-person enrichment opportunities, and access to summer learning.**

- Offer teachers extra paid hours to provide individual academic support to their students, to do weekly check-ins by text or other platforms outside of class, and provide weekly attendance certificates and other incentives to promote attendance.
- Provide socially-distanced on-site academic opportunities at school buildings and/or in the community.
- Offer transportation to all available in-person enrichment opportunities.
- Tutoring specifically designed for remote and hybrid learners has shown positive outcomes.

## **6. Offer early childhood education services for young children experiencing homelessness.**

- Provide transportation to existing in-person options.
- Increase capacity in preschool, Head Start, child care, and early intervention programs by adding priority slots for children experiencing homelessness, using funds to increase the child care subsidy rate, and providing targeted training for educators and para-professionals on identifying and supporting families and children experiencing homelessness.
- Develop an early childhood homelessness navigator system for each region in a state, and/or a navigator at the state level for birth to 5.
- Hire early childhood homelessness specialists at LEA McKinney-Vento programs, Head Start programs, and child care programs who assist in the identification and support of young children experiencing homelessness and their families.

## **7. Make systems and processes more McKinney-Vento friendly.**

- Upgrade online enrollment systems to ensure they are fully and easily accessible to families and students experiencing homelessness. Consult our guide to Removing Barriers to Online Enrollment.
- Increase professional development to teachers, registrars, social workers, counselors, early childhood education staff, special education teams, and all school staff.
- Simplify school-level housing questionnaires and conduct a review to ensure the wording is clear and offered in multiple languages.

## **8. Help meet rising mental health needs.**

- Screen for trauma, either in person or online. Simple, well-researched instruments include UCLA's COVID-19 Screen for Child/Adolescent PTSD and the Structured Trauma-Related Experiences and Symptoms Screener.
- Invite community mental health providers to support students virtually and/or on-site at schools.
- Implement trauma-informed training and practices available from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, ACES Aware, or similar resources. A recent review of programs with proven track records, many of which offer free tools and free online training, can help schools get started.

- Adopt positive school discipline practices school- and district-wide.
- Center equity: Take extra steps to ensure students of color have access to mental health supports, as research has found them less likely to reach out to teachers or counselors for mental health assistance. Also, ensure mental health providers are LGBTQ+ positive and offer online resources sensitive to the challenges of LGBTQ+.

**9. Provide more and better transportation options -- in cases where it has been determined to be the most cost-effective available transportation option, and where the LEA has received written approval from the SEA, if the purchase amounts to a cost greater than \$5,000 and is expected to remain in use for a period of more than one year.**

- Increase capacity of existing bus services by hiring more drivers and purchasing more buses.
- Partner with public transportation providers to offer no-cost or reduced-cost bus passes, train passes, bikeshare access, etc.
- Create a transportation one-stop “hub” where rides could be coordinated to and from school, early childhood, and summer programs.
- Contract with rideshare providers to ensure that older students are able to get to and from school (where allowed and within your district’s legal guidelines)
- Purchase a fleet of vehicles that families experiencing homelessness can use as a car share option, to transport their children to and from school and learning opportunities.
- Assist parents and youth to obtain drivers’ licenses, and reimburse youth and parents for gasoline.

**Additional Resource:** School Reopening and Recovery: Considerations for Serving Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

**HOW ARE YOU USING OR PLANNING TO USE RELIEF FUNDS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?**

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

**SHARE YOUR EXAMPLES AND IDEAS HERE:**

**[WWW.SCHOOLHOUSECONNECTION.ORG/HOW-TO-USE-ARP-FUNDS](http://WWW.SCHOOLHOUSECONNECTION.ORG/HOW-TO-USE-ARP-FUNDS)**