PROGRESS & PROMISE: An Early Look at COVID Relief Funds for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness
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On the morning of March 6, 2021, after an all-night session of partisan debate on the American Rescue Plan Act, U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) took to the Senate floor to offer a bipartisan amendment1 to set aside funds to support the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

“This is the moment we’ve been waiting for,” she said, “an amendment that is so bipartisan we’ve already agreed to a voice vote.”

For over 1.3 million children and youth experiencing homelessness, it was indeed a long-awaited moment.

The pandemic increased the disruption, trauma, deprivation and isolation that students experiencing homelessness endure every day. For many, it also weakened their connection to the single greatest source of stability and support in their lives — school.

Yet prior to the American Rescue Plan Act, federal aid from COVID relief packages was not reaching most children and youth experiencing homelessness. In a fall 2020 survey of school district homeless liaisons conducted by SchoolHouse Connection and the University of Michigan, only 18% of respondents indicated that CARES Act funding was being used to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. In addition, most children and youth experiencing homelessness were not eligible or prioritized for COVID housing and homeless assistance due to differences in federal definitions of homelessness. The failure to specifically direct federal aid to students experiencing homelessness undoubtedly contributed to the 22% drop in school enrollment of students experiencing homelessness between School Year 2018-2019 and 2020-21.

Senator Murkowski’s amendment created what is now known as the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) Fund. At $800 million, ARP-HCY is eight times the annual appropriation for the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program, the only federal education program that removes barriers to school identification, enrollment, attendance, and success caused by homelessness.

1 Senator Murkowski was joined in offering the amendment by U.S. Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ), Rob Portman (R-OH), Susan Collins (R-ME) and Dan Sullivan (R-AK).
The U.S. Department of Education released ARP-HCY funds to States in two tranches: $200 million in late April 2021 (ARP-HCY I, distributed to LEAs on a competitive basis) and $600 million in late July 2021 (ARP-HCY II, distributed to LEAs by formula).

This report provides an early look at how some school districts across the country are using or planning to use their ARP-HCY funds to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness, as well as how state education agencies are using funds reserved for statewide activities. Despite the many challenges of the pandemic, ARP-HCY funds show great promise for schools and state agencies to increase their capacity to identify, re-engage, and support children and youth experiencing homelessness at a time of growing need. While these are one-time funds which must be spent by January 2025, they have the potential to create lasting changes in how our nation’s public schools respond to student homelessness and meet urgent needs.

Reaching More Schools to Meet More Needs

To understand the potential impact of ARP-HCY, consider that at the current EHCY annual funding level, fewer than one in four school districts receive dedicated funding to identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Based on early data from 37 states, the number receiving these funds will increase more than six-fold, meaning that many local educational agencies (LEAs) that have never received specific support to respond to student homelessness will now be able to do so.

Another distinguishing feature of ARP-HCY funds is that they afford districts broader and more flexible options for using funds to meet urgent needs — including, in particular, by emphasizing partnerships with community-based organizations. ARP-HCY funds may be used for “any expenses necessary to facilitate the identification, enrollment, retention, or educational success of homeless children and youth in order to enable homeless children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities.” General categories of expenditures of ARP-HCY funds include:

- Capacity Building and Staffing
- Outreach and Identification
- Transportation
- Housing-Related Supports
- Prepaid Debit and Store Cards

MISSING STUDENTS: 2020-2021 DATA

The U.S. Department of Education recently released data on students experiencing homelessness from the first full school year of the pandemic (2020-2021). The data show a 15% drop in the identification and enrollment of students experiencing homelessness from the previous year, and a 22% drop from the year prior to the pandemic (2018-2019) - from 1.3 million homeless students in 2018-2019 to just over 1 million homeless students in 2020-2021. A large majority of school district homeless liaisons surveyed in the fall of 2020 attributed drops in enrollment during the pandemic to the challenges of identifying students experiencing homelessness during virtual learning, not to an actual decline in homelessness.

Analysis of the 2020-2021 data shows that the enrollment declines were most significant for students who identified as Black (21%), followed by students staying in shelters (18%), youth who are homeless on their own, or unaccompanied youth (16%), and students who are staying temporarily with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons (15%).

As state and local educational agencies gear up for a new school year, it is essential to increase training on homelessness, and deploy specific identification, outreach, and support strategies. This is all the more urgent given the prolonged impact of the recovery, and the ongoing inflation and housing crises. The state and local highlights in this report provide compelling examples of how to reach and support these students using local, state, and federal funds, as well as partnerships with
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- Academic Support
- Wrap-around Services
- Early Childhood
- Postsecondary Planning and Transition

LEAs also may use funds for any of the sixteen uses permitted by the EHCY program (see Allowable and Strategic Uses of ARP-HCY funds for more information about ARP-HCY use of funds).

Recommendations: Supporting Recovery Through Dedicated Funding for Students Experiencing Homelessness

The economic disruptions of the pandemic, from inflation to housing costs to other family stressors, are expected to increase family and youth homelessness. Increased homelessness, in turn, could jeopardize the education and futures of many more students. Indeed, homelessness contributes to some of the most disturbing pandemic-related trends in education, from declines in K-12 and postsecondary enrollment to chronic absence to academic loss to mental health challenges.

Just as funding to schools provided by COVID relief packages prior to the American Rescue Plan failed to reach most students experiencing homelessness because it was not designed for them, other federal education programs more generally geared toward disadvantaged students also fall short. Without the rights and protections of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the support provided by the EHCY program, students experiencing homelessness will face barriers to accessing any local, state, and federal investments in education.

We hope these early highlights will inform and inspire state and local educational agencies to use funds — whether pandemic relief funds like ARP-HCY, or ARP ESSER, or other federal funds, including Title I Part A — to improve identification and services for this hidden, vulnerable, and often overlooked population.

We also urge the Biden Administration and Congress to support ARP-HCY levels of funding for the EHCY program, so that students who struggle with homelessness are able to emerge from this traumatic chapter with the same opportunities as their peers. $800 million in dedicated funding represents less than 2% of the total federal K-12 education budget, but would allow many more school districts to receive the targeted assistance they need to identify and remove barriers for students experiencing homelessness. It also would allow school districts to maintain and build upon their ARP-HCY partnerships and innovation. Finally, allocating federal aid specifically targeted to supporting students experiencing homelessness will allow states and districts to continue to address the overall declines in enrollment and engagement, and other pandemic challenges (including the youth mental health crisis).
STATE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARP-HCY FUNDS

In June 2022, SHC requested information from state homeless education coordinators about the current status of their implementation of ARP-HCY funds. Thirty-seven states responded.

Notable trends include:

» To date, ARP-HCY funds have reached an additional 6,324 LEAs that do not receive regular McKinney-Vento subgrants in the 37 states that responded. In the 33 of those states that have distributed both ARP-HCY I and ARP-HCY II funds, this represents a 611% increase in the number of LEAs receiving dedicated homeless education funding, with state increases ranging from 60% to 2300%.

» LEAs that would have received less than $5,000 for their ARP-HCY II allocation were allowed and encouraged to form a consortium with other LEAs, thus allowing LEAs with fewer students identified as experiencing homelessness to pool their resources for a greater regional impact. To date, 1,949 LEAs are participating in 231 ARP-HCY consortia across the responding states.

» States were permitted to reserve up to 25% of their allocations of ARP-HCY I and ARP-HCY II for statewide activities, including partnering with other agencies to deliver services. States reported the following uses of these statewide funds:

  » Outreach and Identification (27 states)
  » Capacity Building and Staffing (26 states)
  » Wraparound Services (22 states)
  » Data Collecting and Reporting (17 states)
  » Academic support (11 states)
  » Housing-Related Supports (9 states)
  » Early Childhood (8 states)
  » Postsecondary Planning and Transition (8 states)
  » Transportation (5 states)
  » Pre-paid debit and store cards (3 states)
STATE SPOTLIGHTS
Early in the pandemic, Louisiana observed a significant decrease in the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness. In response, Louisiana decided to focus its ARP-HCY statewide funds on family engagement. The emphasis on family engagement is supported both by research that shows that students with engaged families have better health, education and overall life outcomes and by Federal laws, such as the McKinney-Vento Act, Title I Part A, and IDEA, that require educators to engage parents/families in meaningful ways. Louisiana’s goal in using its statewide ARP-HCY funds is to support families in being more engaged in their children's education, regardless of housing status, while also strengthening family-school relationships.

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is partnering with Louisiana Public Broadcasting on a media campaign that uses television commercials and Public Service Announcements to launch the family engagement initiative, highlighting the definition of family engagement and providing resources to reach and engage families. In addition, the Department is providing Ready to Learn Family Workshops to over 750 families across the state to expose families to enrichment activities through play. LDOE also partnered with All Here, a mobile messaging app, to launch the “Be Engaged Bot,” which provides 24/7 tutoring and mental health services to families experiencing homelessness, and launched the Be Engaged Framework, which provides daily guidance to schools and districts on building relationships. LDOE also implemented PimsPoints, which is a tool to incentivize parents to increase engagement while providing economic relief through coupons. Lastly, LDOE used its annual statewide survey to get feedback from parents to guide future initiatives.

In conjunction with the Be Engaged campaign, the State McKinney-Vento Coordinator, Dr. Antiqua Hunter, is focusing statewide professional development efforts on instructing Homeless Liaisons about how to engage and build quality relationships with families that are experiencing homelessness.

“We all play a part in getting each child to graduation day, and it is our goal to find and connect with students and families who have become disengaged because of the pandemic. We want to strengthen the relationships to support re-engagement and success no matter where they reside or their socioeconomic status. As we begin to focus on engaging families by building their capacity, it is our aim to intentionally empower the support nucleus which will ultimately impact student achievement.”

Dr. Antiqua Hunter, McKinney-Vento State Coordinator
New Mexico set aside 25% from both its ARP-HCY I and II allocations for state-level activities. Recognizing the problem of under-identification of students experiencing homelessness, the state is utilizing ARP-HCY II funds to establish regional coordinators in three Regional Education Cooperatives (RECs) to build capacity in 16 member districts that are rural and struggle with under-identification.

The state also has directed ARP-HCY funds for training and professional development, including developing communities of practice on Supporting Immigrant Students, Special Education and Homelessness, Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness, and Exploring Housing Scenarios.

New Mexico is also providing targeted outreach and technical assistance for LEAs that have not identified any students experiencing homelessness, including 20 rural and 20 state charter schools. The state also provided subgrants to 19 state charter schools to increase the identification of students experiencing homelessness in those LEAs. To date, the statewide identification of students experiencing homelessness for the 2021-2022 school year has increased by over 4,000 from the previous school year.

Currently, the state is working to create community navigator positions in hubs around New Mexico to support McKinney-Vento families in accessing support and services.

"Think Outside the Backpack!"

Dana Malone, EHCY State Coordinator
New Hampshire will distribute the majority of its statewide funds to community-based organizations (CBOs). The state ran a competitive subgrant process, receiving proposals from CBOs across the state for addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. This work will focus on building relationships with homeless liaisons and providing professional development from those with experience in connecting with and engaging youth. In addition, to advance the goal of helping youth experiencing homelessness connect to wrap-around services, youth voices have been emphasized throughout the application process. The partnerships developed between the CBOs and district homeless liaisons will be essential to continuation of the efforts on behalf of youth after ARP-HCY funding is no longer available.

“Being a small state, we are able to get almost all of the state-level funds out to the field. Our hope is that through collaboration with district liaisons, these organizations will increase identification and support for youth in our state.”

Christy Dotson, EHCY State Coordinator
Maine is prioritizing capacity building and staffing, outreach and identification, and wraparound services with its statewide ARP-HCY funds. Specifically, Maine is contracting with local homeless youth service providers in order to connect youth, families, and school staff with local resources to build a sustainable model of partnerships across communities.

Under these partnerships, each local service provider will provide one full-time staff member per region to support systems and resource navigation. This staff member will be available as a regional support and navigator for youth, families, and, especially, school staff. In addition, these navigators will support identification efforts and build awareness across other community organizations.

The state has chosen to partner with organizations that work with underserved populations, including LGBTQ+, immigrant, and rural communities. These organizations also will provide professional development specific to working with homelessness in these populations. The State Coordinator is supplementing ARP-HCY funds with an extra grant from the Maine Department of Education for ARP ESSER State reservation funds, which will provide an extra $800,000 to support the partnerships.

In addition, the State Coordinator is partnering with a Youth Action Board to provide final approval for any McKinney-Vento materials developed by the state, including outreach materials, PowerPoint presentations, website information, etc. This partnership will help the state ensure that materials are relevant and accessible to youth and families. The Youth Action Board will also be providing training and technical assistance to schools on authentic youth partnerships.

“With this funding, all states have such a unique opportunity to face some systemic issues for McKinney-Vento students. Maine is making progress towards sustainable change. Our partnerships are building capacity statewide by improving collaboration between community organizations and schools. We are tapping into the expertise of folks with lived experience that can be shared with liaisons to improve outcomes for all of our McKinney-Vento students."

Amelia Lyons, EHCY State Coordinator
Arkansas set aside 25% from both ARP-HCY I and II funds in order to focus on outreach, identification, and wrap-around services. The state is using the funds to partner with two community-based organizations (CBOs): Bright Futures and Every Arkansan. Through the partnership with Bright Futures, a rapid response structure will be established to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness across the state within 24 hours. The partnership with Every Arkansan is two-pronged: First, a Dream Center will provide mobile after school programming, bringing food and tutoring into communities. Second, City Serve, a warehouse that receives donations of returns, overstocked items, and discontinued items from various corporations, will work with faith-based organizations to get resources from the warehouse into the community to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness. Arkansas wrote its state plan to reflect the development of rapid response structures to bring resources to students experiencing homelessness.

Having these funds available for our state has allowed us to build partnerships in our communities to better serve our students. We are creating an infrastructure of rapid response to student needs. I have seen districts that have never utilized EHCY grants or funds, come alive looking for ways to best serve the students in their districts that qualify for these services. Connections are being made within districts and across the state. There has not been this much talk and action to help students experiencing homelessness in Arkansas since the initiation of the McKinney-Vento EHCY grant. I am eager to see what is put into place and the lasting effects this has on the students, the districts, and the communities. Our goal is to create structures that can one day help all students in need.”

Jessica Hickman, EHCY
State Coordinator
Hawaii is unique in that it serves as both the LEA and the SEA. Hawaii served 3,254 students identified as experiencing homelessness in 2021-21. To meet the needs of these students, Hawaii will focus on four main areas of support: transportation, early childhood, outreach and re-engagement, and connecting community, families, students, and school.

Using ARP-HCY funds, the state will hire a navigator to focus on each of these four areas. In addition Hawaii will enter into contracts and partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) to increase staff capacity and connect families to needed supports and services, such as housing, employment, and other health and human services.

The transportation focus will provide students with access to transportation in order to increase attendance and full participation in school. The navigator focusing on early childhood will emphasize the identification of students ages 0-5 in order to connect them with early education and quality childcare services and to provide support to families in the transition to kindergarten. In the area of outreach and re-engagement, program staff will connect with students who have become disconnected from school, or are at risk of disconnecting, and will work with providers of alternative education programs to provide options for school completion and support for the post-graduation transition. Finally, the navigator focusing on “connecting community” will work to strengthen networks between students, families, school, and the community to create education hubs in strategic locations to meet family needs.

Through these positions and this support, the state will work toward a five-year goal of increasing the rate of students in unstable housing who attend and successfully complete school to match the rate of their housed peers.

“...We are continuously assessing needs statewide, and are contracting, hiring, and purchasing from the state level to address common needs. ARP HCY funds make it possible to also localize the needs assessment and provide for substantive and targeted supports for students in unstable housing.”

Toby Portner, EHCY State Coordinator
LOCAL SPOTLIGHTS
LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

The entries on the following pages represent a small sample of the excellent work happening across the country by local and regional educational agencies to use ARP-HCY funds to identify, stabilize, and support children and youth experiencing homelessness.

While we’ve organized these highlights according to a particular use of funding, most education agencies are using ARP-HCY funds to address a variety of needs.

SchoolHouse Connection will continue to collect and compile local profiles of ARP-HCY funds, and publish them regularly on our website and in our e-newsletter.
Monte del Sol Charter School serves approximately 360 total students, with a large population of immigrant students, primarily Spanish-speaking, in grades 7-12. The number of students experiencing homelessness has increased in the last seven years from one student to 45 (as of mid-May) and many are immigrants. The part-time homeless liaison has worked hard to build relationships with families over the last seven years, providing a food bank as a way to meet needs and establish trust. As the liaison got to know the school’s families, it became evident that the school needed a fully bilingual staff member to support communication with families experiencing homelessness.

The homeless liaison was already working with the city to support families in accessing rental assistance through systems navigation. As the application process for rental assistance has become more cumbersome, immigrant families experiencing homelessness needed someone to help navigate the application in their native language. With ARP-HCY funds, the homeless liaison created a part-time Bilingual Benefits Navigator position to meet this need. The school hired a Navigator who was already a staff member and already had strong relationships with families and the community.

The Bilingual Benefits Navigator has lived experience that helps build connections and trust with families. The Navigator is primarily working on housing navigation, helping families apply for state rental and utility assistance with federal relief funds. However, the position has flexible hours and is able to support families in other ways, such as helping a mom and daughter navigate shopping for basic needs like clothing. In addition, thanks to the relationships that have been established, the Navigator assists with identification of students. Families trust her with information about their living situations that they don't feel comfortable sharing with others. The Navigator is also a support person for pregnant and parenting teens on campus, again drawing from her own lived experience. The Navigator is skilled in helping families with significant needs and has been critical in the school’s work with children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness who are also Spanish-speaking. The success of this position has been significant and the school anticipates writing future grant proposals, including for an EHCY subgrant, to sustain this position.

Our school serves mostly immigrant families, including many established families who have relatives from Mexico move in and double up due to financial hardship. The continuity with families helps us to identify and support those who are experiencing homelessness. Families come into our school and I already have a history with them. With this Navigator position, we are able to serve our families in a caring and empathic way in their language.

Cate Moses, Homeless Education Liaison
Richland County School District One (Richland One) is using ARP-HCY funds to increase the capacity of its McKinney-Vento program for the first time. The district has created two positions to support the work of the long-time homeless liaison. The first position funded with ARP-HCY funds will be an administrative assistant to support the overall work of the program. The second position will be a case manager position who will focus on outreach and identification, as well as systems navigation, supporting the work of the liaison and continuing to build up the program.

Richland One has identified fewer students experiencing homelessness because of the pandemic, and overall enrollment numbers are down. However, increasing staff capacity with ARP-HCY funds provides the opportunity to intensify efforts to find and support these students.

In addition to adding staff members, Richland One will use ARP-HCY funds to support the work of a new partnership with the NAACP. Through a fellowship with law students from the University of South Carolina, the NAACP will provide clinics around the district to connect families with housing navigators and legal resources. The NAACP will provide trained housing navigators to walk families through housing issues ranging from eviction to tenant-landlord issues. Families will benefit from the pro-bono legal expertise provided, as well as the comprehensive connections to community resources. ARP-HCY funds will pay for school staff time to be available during the clinics, but the clinics themselves will not require funding, making this housing resource sustainable into the future.

“I am excited because for the first time we are able to help with capacity which is a huge need in our district. I’m excited about the wonderful footprint this work will leave.”

Deborah C. Boone, McKinney-Vento/PASS Coordinator
The Roanoke City Schools McKinney-Vento Program Coordinator is using ARP-HCY funds to increase program staff capacity. In addition to the coordinator, the program has been employing a part-time staff person to provide support. Using ARP-HCY funds, the part-time position has become a full-time Outreach Specialist position to support the work of receiving referrals and determining the eligibility of students. ARP-HCY funds also have been used to hire a part-time Family Outreach Specialist to manage and distribute community donations to students and families, as well as to support the LEA's work on chronic absenteeism among students experiencing homelessness.

Another focus of Roanoke's ARP-HCY funding is supporting unaccompanied homeless youth. Roanoke City Schools is using funds to support their “Senior Shine and Dine” event to celebrate the graduation and success of seniors identified as experiencing homelessness. ARP-HCY funds are paying for iPad purchases seniors can use to work on college applications, FAFSA applications, and other postsecondary planning and transitions. The Program Coordinator is in the process of developing an additional program for seniors that will focus on independent living skills to assist youth in the next stage of their college or career journey. ARP-HCY funds will be used to employ a McKinney-Vento Peer Support Specialist. One of the requirements for this position is the candidate experienced homelessness as a youth.

In addition, ARP-HCY funds have made it possible for Roanoke City Schools to hire a part-time licensed clinical social worker to support the creation of the independent living skills program. The social worker will provide regular support and professional development to staff who experience secondary trauma from supporting McKinney-Vento students in crisis. The LEA has seen an increase in domestic violence situations as a result of the pandemic. The social worker will also conduct an initial assessment of the family and student’s situation, as well as help accessing community organizations to support survivors of domestic violence.

The Program Coordinator will collect data on these initiatives, evaluate their effectiveness, and explore additional funding to sustain them.
Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Saint Paul Public Schools has seen a significant decrease in identified students experiencing homelessness in the district. Over 800 students formerly receiving services through the district’s McKinney-Vento program have not been identified, due to an increase in families moving out of the district and an increase of “doubled up” homelessness, which is harder to identify. With ARP-HCY funds, Saint Paul Public Schools was able to increase staffing capacity to identify and support youth and their families experiencing homelessness in the district and provide new, impactful programming.

When Saint Paul Public Schools received its first tranche of ARP-HCY funds, the district hired six part-time social workers and two teachers’ assistants over the summer, who worked to connect with families who left the district amid COVID-19 to make sure their children are enrolled in school and have a clear plan for attendance in the fall; supported students with credit recovery, making sure high school students were prepared to graduate amid learning loss; and ensured students experiencing homelessness had access to summer school. Further, a tutor was brought on to provide summer school for the district’s homeless children and youth (with a focus on young children) and navigators were hired at each school to identify those who are experiencing housing instability, and need support to remain housed.

Arguably the greatest impact of ARP-HCY in Saint Paul Public Schools has come from the new innovative programming that the funding has made possible. The district has developed a partnership with Youth Build, a national organization that engages youth through community service projects. Youth experiencing homelessness in the district who participate in the Youth Build program are given stipends for the participation — using ARP funds — while they build high school credit and develop professional development skills. In addition, in partnership with two local shelters, the district hosted and funded family field trips to the Minnesota Zoo, providing families with transportation, Zoo tickets, food, water, and books on animals for the youth — and most importantly, time for family bonding.

"People get stuck by the systems, because the systems are so broken. What’s important as liaisons is that we need to think outside of the box. If we work within the confines of what has always been done, we’ll get stuck in a wheel, expecting different results. ARP-HCY money has allowed us to do what we know works best for our kids, and has given us an opportunity to expand our services in new, impactful ways.

Heather Alden, Supervisor, Project Reach and Fostering Connections"
In the last year, amid the converging COVID-19 and housing crises, Ardmore City Schools’ population of students experiencing homelessness more than doubled, exponentially overextending the McKinney-Vento program’s capacity to identify and perform outreach to students experiencing homelessness, as well as its budget, specifically its transportation expenditures. Working with braided funding from the Title I Homeless Set-Aside, McKinney-Vento Sub-grant, and American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP-ESSER), Ardmore City Schools was able to meet the needs of those identified students. Title I Homeless Set-Aside funds were primarily used for the excess cost of transportation for students to attend their school of origin; McKinney-Vento Sub-grant funds were used to pay the salaries for a District Grants Coordinator and an Outreach/Resource Assistant, school supplies, school clothing items, and activity fees; and ARP ESSER III funds were utilized to cover the costs of school clothing items, which exceeded the district’s expectations for the budgeted amount in the McKinney-Vento Sub-grant.

ARP-HCY funds will provide the opportunity for the district to increase capacity to serve students experiencing homelessness. Stipends will be given to staff points of contact at each school within the district to support identification (with a focus on unenrolled students and those who are in the early childhood education age-range). School site points of contact will also aid to increase awareness among teachers and parents about the rights and resources available for students and families experiencing homelessness.

Funding needs for the district’s McKinney-Vento program are determined based on a needs assessment shared with stakeholders at the end of the school year, which asks for qualitative and quantitative data on gaps in identification, provision of resources, and community social service referrals. This data, along with anticipated economic and housing trends in the community is analyzed to determine the funding need for the program by the district’s Homeless Liaison, Finance Director, and Title I Coordinator.

With ARP-HCY, we are approaching adequate funding to address the current needs of our homeless student population to enroll, attend, and participate in public education. These additional funds are necessary to address the needs of students we have currently identified. With sustained funding at this level (even additional funding), school districts could expand programs to establish support programs for homeless students’ post-secondary plans which in turn may help to eliminate or at least alleviate homelessness in our country. With our students, it’s all about hope for the future.

Sabra C. Emde, District Grants Coordinator/Homeless Liaison
Regional Office of Education #3 (ROE #3) serves Bond, Christian, Effingham, Fayette & Montgomery Counties in Illinois. ROE #3 plans to use its ARP-HCY funds to hire a Family Resource Specialist, after it was determined that additional staff capacity was needed to connect directly with families. The Family Resource Specialist identifies families, helps them access the resources they need, provides direct support getting students registered for school, and assists with other administrative supports. ROE #3 also is using ARP-HCY funds to form a partnership with its local Community Action Network, to provide families with emergency housing vouchers. In addition, ROE #3 has used ARP-HCY funds to invest in online tutoring services, through an online tutoring service called “paper.co.” Paper.co services are accessible 24 hours a day, and offer services in a multitude of languages. ROE #3 also provides students with hotspots and cellphones, which allows them to access the service.

Lastly, ROE #3 dedicated a portion of its ARP-HCY allocation towards increasing identification of young children experiencing homelessness. It hosted a regional conference targeted towards early childhood educators, and raising awareness of homelessness amongst young children, and the importance of prompt identification.

“

The ARP-HCY funding has provided some much needed flexibility in funding to utilize in helping McKinney-Vento families with emergency housing. This funding has helped many families not only receive a safe place to stay, but also the time for them to acquire more permanent housing. This has been the missing piece in the McKinney-Vento Act that can truly make a life altering impact.

Angela Reeter, Area 5 McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison
Taos Municipal Schools is using ARP-HCY funds to focus on identification and intensive wraparound services. Because the community is small and works together to support families, district staff knew that providing more wraparound supports in collaboration with the community would make the biggest difference in the lives of students and families. In Taos, there are many intergenerational families, who take each other in when there is a loss of housing. The LEA has seen an increase in numbers of students identified as experiencing homelessness in doubled up intergenerational living situations, as well as a significant increase in the need for mental health support.

ARP-HCY funds will be used to support identification efforts. Staff capacity has increased as a result of ARP-HCY funds, adding an additional four staff members, and there is now a school team of five that is able to identify more students, including two team members who work with Indian Education. Because of these two staff members, the LEA has been able to increase the number of Native students identified as experiencing homelessness. In addition, staff members are attending school events to enhance awareness, and are delivering supplies during breaks and holidays to identified students. This has increased the visibility of staff members in the community.

With the focus on wraparound services, ARP-HCY funds are supporting before- and after-school care (including tutoring) in several nurturing centers in schools around the community. The next phase of these wraparound services is in the process of development by the school team and will focus on providing case management services to families in motels and to families who are being evicted. The school team is partnering with Taos Behavioral Health and other community partners to bring services to the places where families are located, including using community rooms in apartment complexes and open offices in motels. Funds will be used to extend the school team’s contracts in order to provide support during the summer months. Taos Municipal Schools also hopes to extend services to provide parent and grandparent education to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. Taos Municipal Schools also is developing partnerships with local universities for mental health and case management services. Under these partnerships, local universities will provide supervision and stipends to graduate students to provide these services. The school team hopes to expand and provide ten wraparound sites in the community, and will work to find funding sources to continue this work after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.
Lawton Public Schools (LPS) is using ARP-HCY funds to meet immediate needs and to engage students in learning. Working with the district’s IT Director, LPS secured contracts with Verizon to provide cell phones to unaccompanied homeless youth. Cell phones not only support youths’ communication with school, but boost the youths’ self-confidence, since their technology now mirrors that of their peers. LPS asks youth to sign an agreement at the time of distribution, agreeing to answer when school calls, and agreeing to revisit the contract during the summer if the student enrolls in summer school and is employed. In addition, district technology staff meet with students to review how to use the phone and to discuss social media use.

Transportation remains a barrier for students experiencing homelessness at LPS. Among the transportation issues faced by such students are gaps between the time of the request for transportation and the time when transportation begins. LPS employs traveling counselors who provide transportation to bridge these gaps, but the transportation is often unreliable due to counselor schedules. To address these challenges, ARP-HCY funds were used to purchase a vehicle. The vehicle also will be used for students who are enrolled in virtual schooling to access school services, for home visits, and to transport students to needed health services.

With ARP-HCY funds, LPS was able to hire a retired educator to serve as a mentor in the middle school. In addition to this staff member, LPS hired a McKinney-Vento Outreach Specialist. The Outreach Specialist is a social worker who is focusing on supporting students experiencing homelessness in the district’s virtual program. The Outreach Specialist not only checks in on students and supports their academic engagement, but also can follow up with students who are not yet identified. By conducting home visits to these students, the Outreach Specialist is able to identify new students or refer those who are not experiencing homelessness to other school staff for support.

LPS is brainstorming ways to support students experiencing homelessness in preschool. The goal is not only to support young learners, but also to provide education and training for families so that learning can continue, no matter what the family’s living situation.

“Whatever you thought you couldn’t do, now is the time to do it with these funds. We’ve not been able to support our students in these ways until now.”

Andrea Winstead, Title I/IX Facilitator
When ARP-HCY funds became available, the Cherry Creek School District Homeless Liaison identified two major areas of need for students experiencing homelessness.

The first, transportation, was a barrier for homeless students because outside transportation vendors dropped them from their services due to the pandemic. The Homeless Liaison used ARP-HCY I funds to purchase a van to address these needs, and provided specific McKinney-Vento Act training for district staff who drive the van. As a result, students experiencing homelessness have increased access to education with staff who understand their situation, as well as the protections and services that students need to be successful.

The second identified need was at the high school level. The district has seen increased numbers of high school students identified as experiencing homelessness, including a significant increase in the numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth. With ARP-HCY II funds, the district hired a full-time McKinney-Vento Student Support Specialist who brought 22 years of high school experience to this role. When the Student Support Specialist started in the position, she began to meet with staff in each of the high schools—including deans, school safety staff, and school counselors—to train them on the McKinney-Vento Act and how to make referrals. She also began meeting with unaccompanied homeless youth to help them understand their rights, make sure services were provided, and help support postsecondary planning and transitions. With this increase in staff capacity, the Homeless Liaison has more opportunity to work in the community, building awareness and providing training on the McKinney-Vento Act. Both the Homeless Liaison and the Student Support Specialist have begun planning with district staff about how to sustain the position beyond the availability of ARP-HCY funding.

“We want to meet students where they are at. To be here and to be able to help kids is important. Unaccompanied homeless youth are trying to do this all on their own, so I’m glad we can provide them the help that we can because of ARP-HCY funding.”

Leslie Navarro-Walker, District Homeless and Family Engagement Liaison

Catrina Smith, McKinney-Vento Student Support Specialist
To better understand how its ARP-HCY funds should be spent, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) developed a survey that was sent to students and parents experiencing homelessness and to staff and community partners. Using current and past identified student information, MPS was able to use mini-grant funds received from Education Leads Home to provide gift cards for completing the survey, reaching over 200 unique students and parents of students experiencing homelessness. By asking questions about barriers to educational access, as well as what has helped students and families in the past, MPS identified three key areas in which to invest its ARP-HCY funds: transportation, basic needs, and mental health. MPS has matched those needs with ARP-HCY funds and taken steps toward hiring a transportation scheduler, bringing on a summer social worker focused on mental health needs of students experiencing homelessness, and partnering with the local housing authority to provide wrap-around support for accessing housing vouchers. To learn more about the survey and the other ways in which MPS plans to use ARP HCY funds, view this short presentation.

“Some families (33%) felt like there was no one at the school who provided support for their student experiencing homelessness, and that was a really big thing for us to see and realize through this survey.

Melissa Winship,
Homeless/Highly Mobile School Counselor

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MN
For the last four years, Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD) has partnered with the National Center for Youth Law, which funds two full-time educational liaisons to support students experiencing homelessness in the district’s four high schools. In collaboration with the district’s homeless liaison, the educational liaisons provide direct service via intensive case management, and “light touch support,” integrated into the district’s multi-tiered systems of support. These positions provide direct service, supporting academics, college and career readiness, housing, and basic needs, among other things.

Because of its success, MPUSD decided to use ARP-HCY funds to expand and enhance this model. With the district’s EHYC and ARP-HCY I funds, MPUSD hired a social worker for the middle schools to mirror the role of the educational liaisons at the high school level. This position pays particular attention to supporting students through their transition from middle school to high school.

ARP-HCY I funds are also being used to extend basic needs resource centers to the elementary schools. Each school has a resource center on site where students can access washers and dryers, hygiene supplies, and other needed items.

The district has continually experienced the need for families in crisis to have short-term emergency housing. Because 20% of the district’s student population is identified as experiencing homelessness, navigating housing challenges is a significant part of the staff’s work. The educational liaisons began to make connections in the community and quickly developed a partnership with Motel 6 for families needing to access emergency housing. Motel 6 has multiple locations in the area served by the district, and is pet-friendly.

Staff worked with the district business office to develop best practices for tracking the funding, and was ultimately entered into the Motel 6 central billing system. The district receives monthly invoices directly from Motel 6, which it then pays with ARP-HCY II funds. MPUSD created a streamlined referral process to determine which families are eligible for the short-term housing support.

“Emergency housing hasn’t been an option to easily access. Shelters have been unavailable and there have been a lot of challenges. Motel 6 was willing to help solve the problem with a program they already have in place. To hear they are treating our families with the same dignity and respect that we try to tells us the partnership is even better than we hoped.”

Melissa Winship,
Homeless/Highly Mobile School Counselor
emergency housing, and rooms are booked through the office of the Assistant Superintendent of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. The name of the district support person working with the family is also entered into the booking system so that Motel 6 has the direct contact information in case of any issues. Upon checking into Motel 6, families sign a waiver accepting any liability. MPUSD and Motel 6 specifically included in their MOU that the district is not liable for any damages incurred. The first family to access the short-term emergency housing had a great experience, feeling welcomed by Motel 6. Since then, several additional families have accessed the emergency housing as well.
Without knowing how it would come to fruition, Boston Public Schools (BPS) began to lay the groundwork for housing partnerships approximately one year before ARP-HCY funds became available. The combination of ARP-HCY and ESSER funds provided an opportunity for BPS to initiate a unique partnership with the Boston Housing Authority and FamilyAid Boston, a community-based organization. BPS contracts with FamilyAid Boston to provide housing navigation, case management, and housing vouchers to complement federal HUD and private donor funding. The housing vouchers are provided through a combination of public and private funding that does not supplant existing resources.

FamilyAid used the ARP-HCY funds made available through the school district to increase its case management capacity. Case managers provide housing navigation to walk families through the process of preparing housing applications, searching for housing, and signing a lease. In addition, wraparound services are provided to the family, including case management for at least twelve months after the family becomes housed. The case manager works with families to connect them to health and mental health care, support for their social-emotional wellbeing, as well as other needed assistance.

BPS’ housing partnership has led to the development of a second initiative, the Emergency Homelessness Intervention Program. This program provides case management and wraparound services to increase family access to shelters, connect to health care partners, support social-emotional wellbeing, and connect families to financial assistance to break the cycle of homelessness.

These partnerships have been critical components of the academic success of BPS students. Teachers are better able to work with students to meet academic needs because BPS has partnerships to meet non-academic needs. School staff are trained in making referrals to FamilyAid, and the McKinney-Vento points of contact in each school building support the referral process.

Even with forward thinking business office staff and agreement among our top leadership, there were still barriers to facilitate housing support on our own. Part of our plan was to have a seat at the table and a voice with providers. They have expertise that we don’t have to navigate housing barriers so that teachers can focus on teaching.

Brian Marques, Senior Director, Department of Opportunity Youth
The Coos Bay School District (CBSD) has a drop-in center that provides students and families experiencing homelessness within the county with resources for basic needs, as well as laundry services, after school homework support, showers, and food. District funds support the homeless liaison salary, the Educational Assistant’s salary, the cost of the building, and utilities. With ARP-HCY funds, CBSD will pay for staff time to expand the drop-in center to serve students over the summer. With summer hours, staff can check in on students and maintain contact, as well as provide meals in collaboration with Oregon State University (OSU) Coos County Extension Office.

In addition to expanding drop-in center services, CBSD plans to expand the host home project that existed in the district years ago. In partnership with Alternative Youth Activities, a private educational institution, host homes will be available for youth experiencing homelessness beginning in the 2022-23 school year. School staff will support the application process and case management. ARP-HCY funds will be used to provide stipends to host families.

Coos Bay School District will also use ARP-HCY funds for transportation services. In order to provide transportation for students to participate in wraparound services at the drop-in center, the district has both an open tab with cab companies and a vehicle. The wraparound services, which the district provides in collaboration with the OSU Coos County Extension Office, include art therapy, homework help, and life skills like cooking and shopping on a budget.

The district’s homeless liaison also plans to use funds to hire at least one student worker—an at-risk unaccompanied homeless youth—for the summer to support awareness and outreach activities. This will allow school staff to maintain regular contact with the youth and also leverage a youth voice in district activities.

CBSD has prioritized braiding funding in order to maximize different funding sources. Title I, Part A pays for the homeless liaison salary and Title IV / Title I Part D pays the salary of the Educational assistant. The liaison relies on community support and donations, as well as grants, to support basic needs like backpacks and hygiene supplies, and to support the drop-in center. These grants allow the district to serve students experiencing homelessness across the county. In addition, CBSD relies on high school volunteers, who have community service requirements, to manage donations and basic needs. The district’s liaison believes that involving other students in support efforts allows youth to give back, learn about their community, and raise awareness of homelessness in the community.

“When we learned we’d receive ARP-HCY funds, we wanted the bulk of the funds to go directly back to the kids. We find other ways to fund salaries and rely on community donations, collaborations, and other grant funds. Using ARP-HCY funds to take away barriers has been very helpful.”

Melinda Torres, Homeless Liaison
Concord School District’s Homeless Education Coordinator position was created when the district received ARP-HCY funds. The previous homeless liaison wore many hats, and the district realized the need to create a dedicated position to increase staff capacity, provide consistency in serving students experiencing homelessness, and develop policies and procedures. When the Homeless Education Coordinator started in January, 65 students were identified under the McKinney-Vento Act. Due to an influx of families moving to the Concord area, as well as specific and intentional work by the Coordinator, Concord School District has identified 99 McKinney-Vento students as of mid-May.

The Homeless Education Coordinator has placed a particular emphasis on district data collection and analysis. The Coordinator noticed inconsistencies in identification between building points of contact, including cases in which inconsistent determinations of homeless status were made for siblings who shared living situations with each other. The Coordinator began to compare data across school buildings to ensure that siblings in the same living situation across school buildings were identified. In addition, to ensure that students were properly identified, the Coordinator began to search the district’s Student Information System, looking for reported addresses that are hotels and motels in the area. With access to district data systems, the Coordinator can now review data on discipline, absenteeism, academics, and graduation. This data can then be tracked in order to share trends and needs with the school board and community.

In addition to the focus on data, the Coordinator will provide support to each building’s point of contact, including providing specific and targeted training and professional development, refining processes and procedures, and developing forms for identification and services.

“I’ve really learned the importance of data as I’ve taken on this role. The data shows us how we are doing with supporting students and how to serve them better. But not only that, it will show the need for this position and how to make it sustainable after ARP-HCY funds. This position is critical to support both building staff and families.”

Stacey Lazzar, Homeless Education Coordinator
Using ESSER funds, Middletown Public Schools hired a full-time Family Services Coordinator to coordinate services for the increased numbers of identified students experiencing homelessness, particularly among the multilingual learner population. When ARP-HCY I funds were distributed, the Family Services Coordinator began targeted communication and outreach to families to determine needs. Decisions on the best use of ARP-HCY funds were guided by these weekly communications and check-ins, during which time it became clear that families need support with food and winter clothing. The Family Services Coordinator uses ARP-HCY funds to purchase supermarket and store gift cards to enable families to purchase needed items. These gift cards are purchased in collaboration with the district business office, submitting purchase orders through existing store accounts.

In addition, the Family Services Coordinator determined that families need support with wraparound services. ARP-HCY funds are supporting after-school transportation to the Boys and Girls Club for homework support and free meals so that students may finish each day fully fed and with completed homework. In partnership with a community-based organization, Newport Mental Health, the district is also providing mental health services in school buildings during school hours. The Family Services Coordinator hopes to use additional ARP-HCY funds to increase staff training on the McKinney-Vento Act and best practices to support students.

“I think that the flexibility of this funding has been such a huge help to homeless liaisons. There used to be more regulations on the funding but being able to use the money to help with food, phones, taxis as well as wraparound services has meant that we can be more on the front lines helping families in unconventional ways.”

Megan Mainzer, Family Services Coordinator
Durham Public Schools utilizes multiple funding sources to provide extensive supports and services to students experiencing homelessness. Prior to the pandemic, Durham Public Schools identified more than 1,000 students experiencing homelessness. Using Title I, Part A funds, Durham Public Schools pays for the homeless liaison salary and a McKinney-Vento social worker to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. Title I, Part A funds also support salaries and transportation for the tutoring program for identified students. Durham Public Schools also receives McKinney-Vento subgrant funds, which are used to provide tutoring and summer camp programming.

In spending ARP-HCY funds, Durham Public Schools is prioritizing high school students. Unaccompanied homeless youth will have access to academic tutoring, ACT and SAT prep, FAFSA, and college essay writing support. Durham Public Schools is using funds to hire a youth case manager to meet the needs of these youth. Unaccompanied homeless youth will also have access to two years of mental health support through the district.

In addition, Durham Public Schools is expanding tutoring at the elementary and middle school levels, bringing tutors into the buildings with the highest need to ensure direct access.

Durham currently has one shelter that youth over 18 can access. Durham Public Schools is using ARP-HCY funds to create a study space at the shelter to support re-engagement of youth and access to educational programming.

“I’m excited because if it had not been for ARP-HCY funding, there is a lot we wouldn’t be able to do!”

Ebony Ross, Homeless Liaison

Durham Public Schools,
North Carolina
The Menominee Indian School District (MISD) is located on the Menominee Indian Reservation in rural Wisconsin. As a tribal community, cultural connections are important, and the district strives to serve students and families through a network of relationships. The district has placed a strong emphasis on identifying students experiencing homelessness, and currently identifies about 10% of the total student population as eligible for McKinney-Vento services.

When COVID-19 shut down in-person learning, the district quickly realized that school is the main source of safety and stability for students experiencing homelessness, as well as the primary place for students to access food. In response, MISD used ARP-HCY funds to set up a support room at the high school where students experiencing homelessness can access washers and dryers, as well as hygiene supplies and shelf-stable food. The district evaluated the needs of students and families and decided to provide these resources year-round by remaining open all summer long. This support room also provides a place for students to connect with school staff.

Using district funds, MISD has hired Student Success Mentors in each building. The school district is using ARP-HCY funds to pay a portion of the mentors’ salary in order to specifically support students experiencing homelessness. Every student is assigned to a Success Mentor, and for many students experiencing homelessness, the Mentor checks in daily to ensure that needs are being met and relationships are being established.

The district also plans to use ARP-HCY funds to purchase prepaid cell phones for students and to pay for passes for community transportation so that students can access school buildings and school staff all year round.

“Because we are a tribal school and families are so interconnected, relationships are crucial. We are careful not to put all our eggs in one basket but to create positions that can continue long after funding ends. We are thoughtful and intentional about funding streams, and know that the work we start with ARP-HCY will continue after the funding period is over.”

Kate Mikle, Principal, Menominee Indian High School
The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) is a geographically very large district comprised of three regions – the Southern, Central, and Eastern areas of the Kenai Peninsula. Schools on the Eastern Peninsula have historically never had a dedicated local, community-based liaison. In an effort to provide greater equity of service and ensure that all students eligible for services are identified and supported, KPBSD used ARP-HCY I funds to create a McKinney-Vento Liaison position to support the students, schools, and communities in this area.

With ARP-HCY II funds, KPBSD analyzed needs that, previously, were unmet with McKinney-Vento funds. The Students in Transition (SIT) team recognized the need for mental health services for youth who are seeking these supports, but have not been able to access them. As a result, the SIT team has contracted with a local agency to provide private mental health services.

In an agreement with another community-based agency, ARP-HCY II funds will be used to offer families emergency hotel stays and vehicle repairs in order to support the attendance and retention of students in school. KPBSD is managing the funds, and the community-based agency will bill KPBSD after services are rendered.

The SIT team will use ARP-HCY II funds to offer additional staffing hours for liaisons in the Eastern and Southern KPBSD, which will increase the capacity to maintain consistent communication and connection to youth and families during winter and summer breaks. ARP-HCY II funds will also be used for professional development opportunities.

The SIT team saw the need for unaccompanied homeless youth to have access to communication via cell phones (with only voice call and texting capabilities). Through ARP-HCY II funds, the team will be able to purchase cell phones and minute cards for these youth, as well as for SIT staff for program use. The two-way communication will help ensure the safety of students and facilitate the youth’s ability to communicate with their schools and SIT staff about current circumstances and needs.

Each of the things we put in place was done so very intentionally, stemming directly from the needs we saw through our work with students and families - needs that we haven’t been able to meet before through regular McKinney-Vento funding. We want to continually grow and refine what we are doing to support students in the most meaningful ways we can, and with the most impactful opportunities. ARP-HCY is a way to make that happen.

Kelly King, Students in Transition Program Coordinator
ARP-HCY II funds also will be used to help youth gain exposure and connection to a variety of opportunities within their state. Because many youths have never left the Peninsula, funds will be used to carry out meaningful, enriching field trip activities in other parts of the state, focusing on the arts, nature, history, and government. Funds will pay for travel costs, supplies, and gear that students may need to attend and fully participate.

Finally, ARP-HCY II funds are being used to create paid work experience positions for three student workers over the summer. These youth are helping host a booth at the local “Wednesday Market,” a large community-based event that hosts hundreds of visitors each week. Students are tasked with engaging community members in conversations about Federal programs offered by the KPBSD (including the SIT Program) and the district’s suicide prevention program, handing out informational resources, playing games with children, etc. This opportunity will help youth to learn work expectations, teach important skills, and give youth experience to add to a resume.
This is the first time that Ridgefield School District received dedicated, specific funding to support students experiencing homelessness. When Ridgefield School District learned it would be receiving ARP-HCY funds, the Assistant Director of Social Emotional Learning began to survey school staff, including counselors, administrators, connection mentors (social-emotional learning support staff), and the family resource center coordinator. District staff identified key needs of mental health services, tutoring, and transportation. The Assistant Director then surveyed every family identified as experiencing homelessness in the district. Families indicated that they did not feel connected to school and that they needed more communication between home and school. The Assistant Director met with each student identified as an unaccompanied homeless youth at the high school level and learned that needs would have to be met on an individual basis.

Based on survey results, Camp Cope-A-Lot, an online curriculum, will be purchased to address mental health issues, especially stress and anxiety. Camp Cope-A-Lot is an online program to help kids learn coping strategies to manage stress and anxiety. Because the district has 1:1 chromebooks, students can access Camp Cope-A-Lot both at home and at school. In addition, the district also plans to purchase a family account that aligns with the student’s account.

The district also is working on a plan to better engage families through regular free and fun educational activity events in partnership with the town of Ridgefield. The district plans to use ARP-HCY funds to purchase educational games for community events and to use the events to provide opportunities to foster relationships. These events will also support increased identification, as more families are connecting with school and the homeless liaison. The activities purchased for the events will also be available for family ‘check out’ at the Family Resource Center, in order to build educational access and relationships at home.

“I always go back to my own lived experience. I would have attended school more if I would have had coping strategies to manage my stress and anxiety about missing school because of my living situation. I want to make sure to build connections, empathy and understanding between school and families. These funds are helping to make it possible.”

Kataira Smith, Assistant Director of Social Emotional Learning and Homeless Liaison
Capital School District is using ARP-HCY funds to focus on three main areas of need within the district.

First, Capital School District expanded staff capacity to serve homeless students, using ARP-HCY funds to convert a part-time position for a paraprofessional into a full-time staff position focusing on supporting students and families experiencing homelessness.

Second, the district found that one of the greatest needs is maintaining communication with families. Many families lacked cell phone minutes or data to contact school, would change numbers frequently, or lose cell phone service altogether. To address these challenges, the district developed a partnership with Premier Wireless, which contracts with T-Mobile, to provide low cost phones to families experiencing homelessness. With this partnership, the district is able to provide cell phones with unlimited data and minutes to students and families for two years. The district will use ARP-HCY funds to pay $35/month for these cell phone contracts. The phones allow the district to connect with families and keep in touch regarding the education of their children. The district also was able to add school-related apps and phone numbers in order to facilitate direct contact with support staff. Families will sign an agreement upon receipt of the phone to accept responsibility and liability for the device. The district expects that providing these phones will improve communication between home and school, and the district will look for ways to sustain funding to support this initiative after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.

The third area of need that Capital School District identified is for a parent center not located in a school building. Over the years, Capital School District has attempted to create a parent center, but has faced challenges with space, parents coming in and out of school buildings, and families feeling comfortable accessing a center located within a school building. With the additional ARP-HCY funds, district staff has imagined a true community center, located in the community—a space that could hold a washer and dryer, a refrigerator and freezer for food pantry donations, computers, office space to meet with families to share resources, and a training space to provide support with job skills and resume building. The district envisions a partnership with community organizations to find a suitable location, to help staff the parent center, and to cross train with school staff.

“This is a big undertaking, but we believe that it is doable to meet the needs of families. Families already have multiple barriers walking into a school and we hope the parent center will be a place that helps remove some of the stigma around services that our students receive. We want to be thoughtful about how to continue this initiative after the funding is no longer available.

LaWanda Burgoyne,
Supervisor of Student Services
Thanks to the availability of ARP-HCY funds, the district has begun planning meetings with community partners in order to make the parent center a reality. ARP-HCY funds will support the rental of the space and the supplies that are to be provided to families. The district anticipates that a parent center that is easily accessible to the community by being located on bus lines will build connections with families and support enhanced school-family partnerships. Although the plan for the center is still in progress, the district has already begun to dream about expanding and continuing to provide resources, services, and support after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.
When Pershing County School District (PCSD) received ARP-HCY funds, staff immediately began to brainstorm ways to help McKinney-Vento families have easier access to supplies. Prior to receiving ARP-HCY funds, identified families had to go to different school buildings to access school supplies and essential items, which was often overwhelming and intimidating. Because PCSD is a small, rural community, families were hesitant to seek assistance and didn’t want to be identified. PCSD staff looked for a way to make it less obvious for families needing help with basic needs, as well as to support identification efforts.

With the support of the superintendent, the district plans to use an existing building and transform it into a resource center. The goal is to create a space where families feel comfortable, like they are entering a living room. The resource center will provide food, clothing, school supplies, and other supplies families may need, so that their students can get to school on time and be successful. There will be bathroom spaces for students to use in the morning for hygiene purposes. The resource center will house laptops that students can use at the center for homework and will have computers for parents to use for accessing community resources. PCSD hopes to also use the space to provide trainings and mental health supports.

ARP-HCY funds will be used to make the space functional by paying for furniture, computers, other technology, clothing, food, and Visa debit cards. Using district funds, athletic coaches are able to request Visa debit cards for student athletes experiencing homelessness who are traveling and need to pay for meals after athletic events.

The district plans to make the resource center sustainable by writing it into a future McKinney-Vento subgrant application.

“

In a small community, school is the primary support for families experiencing homelessness. We wanted to create a non-threatening, no-judgment one-stop-shop where families can access a lot of different resources. ARP-HCY funds are allowing one time purchases to start this work.

Shauna Bake, MTSS Coordinator

Nancy Meissner, School Counselor

An Early Look at COVID Relief Funds Dedicated to HCY: Local Implementation of ARP-HCY Funds
The School District of Osceola County (SDOC) serves 50 public schools with approximately 2400 students identified as experiencing homelessness as of June 2022. SDOC provided Wraparound services with a SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant from 2018-2021. In 2021, SDOC was awarded the American Rescue Plan - Homeless Children and Youth Grant, allowing the district to serve students experiencing homelessness (Families in Transition-FIT), using the Wraparound Model.

Once students are identified as FIT, school social workers assess needs, behaviors, and attendance, and make a referral for services, if necessary. Referrals are then directed to the Wraparound Homeless Specialist for Wraparound services. ARP-HCY funds support the Wraparound Homeless Specialist position, as well as Wraparound Teams that serve as Facilitators and Family Support Partners. When referrals are received, the Wraparound Homeless Specialist reviews information on the student’s school record and contacts the parents who have a choice of which agency they will work with. The Wraparound team then makes contact with the family and begins working on identifying needs and locating service providers in the community to assist with meeting those needs. The Wraparound Homeless Specialist and Wraparound teams work not only with students who are referred but also with siblings and family members to assist with various needs, such as finding employment, filling out housing applications, applying for public assistance, and getting connected with mental health supports in the community.

ARP-HCY funds also provide school uniforms, extended day, summer camp, transportation, hygiene products and school supplies to the FIT students. In addition SDOC is able to provide 3 nights hotel stay for our homeless families in need of emergency housing.

“ARP-HCY funds have allowed us to meet some of our Families in Transition basic needs, in addition to providing them with Wraparound services, which takes a comprehensive approach to meeting the youth and family needs. Our goal is to keep kids engaged and attending school and these funds help make that possible.

Gigi Salce, Wraparound Homeless Specialist

An Early Look at COVID Relief Funds Dedicated to HCY: Local Implementation of ARP-HCY Funds
The Wilbur Mills Education Service Cooperative in central Arkansas is leading a consortium of ten school districts in using ARP-HCY funds to hire a systems navigator. The co-op staff met with the state homeless education coordinator, school district superintendents, homeless liaisons, counselors, and other district staff members to determine the region’s needs. One emerging theme was the need to create and sustain a systems navigator position. The systems navigator will assist the ten school districts in establishing community and cross-community partnerships with nonprofit organizations. The navigator also will collaborate with Every Arkansan and Bright Futures, two organizations with which the state education agency is contracting (using ARP-HCY funds), to develop a statewide rapid response system to meet the immediate needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The Wilbur Mills Education Service Cooperative systems navigator will be a two-year position and will work to create sustainable practices that will continue when ARP-HCY funding has ended.

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We are excited to be a part of this work that we know will lead to more effective and efficient services/care for our children.

Leasha Hayes, Wilbur Mills Education Service Cooperative

An Early Look at COVID Relief Funds Dedicated to HCY: Local Implementation of ARP-HCY Funds
Marion County Schools is leveraging local, state, and federal funds to provide layered supports for students experiencing homelessness, with a focus on basic needs, mental health, and supplemental instruction. In this predominantly rural area, there are fewer service agencies than in urban areas, making school the main provider of basic needs for students experiencing homelessness. For this reason, after reviewing existing services provided through strong community partnerships, the school district decided to prioritize expenditures of ARP-HCY funds on meeting basic needs. Marion County Schools has also been intentional about ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have access to all district-provided supports. For example, the mental health coordinator works closely with the homeless liaison to ensure that students experiencing homelessness have access to the mental health supports available to other students. School counselors are points of contact across ten schools in five communities, allowing the homeless liaison to focus on working with community partners. This layered support makes it possible for the homeless liaison to use her time to go out to schools and connect with community partners. The homeless liaison salary is paid out of the Title I, Part A homeless reservation, and additional counselor time is provided through the school district’s ARP ESSER funds.

“…you may have heard the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. That is our approach to providing for our homeless students. We take a personal approach to make sure identified students have the same opportunities as anyone else in our system. ARP-HCY funds have certainly made it possible to help ensure our mission of ‘Changing Children’s Lives’.

Kevin Dulaney, Federal Programs Director
When Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) received ARP-HCY funds, the district assessed its needs and quickly prioritized supporting students experiencing homelessness during the summer. GIPS currently has a Community Services Navigator who works with students and families identified under the McKinney-Vento Act at the district’s Early Learning Center. With ARP-HCY I funds, the bilingual parent liaison will be able to support the district’s youngest learners and their families over the summer, helping ensure that they have access to food, clothing, and summer programming opportunities; navigating connections to community partners; and helping ensure students and families experiencing homelessness have summer support.

With ARP-HCY II funds, GIPS is able to expand the current Families in Transition program to continue supporting students and families experiencing homelessness over the summer, with a specific focus on unaccompanied homeless youth. With ESSER III funds, the district significantly increased its academic and enrichment summer programs for all students, but found that students experiencing homelessness had challenges accessing these programs. The summer navigator position will help these students access district programming, and will provide additional support with food, clothing, and connections to community resources.

By adding summer hours for two certified Community Services Navigators and two Family Liaisons (PK-12), GIPS will maintain better communication with families during the summer, which will enhance identification and enrollment efforts for families in the fall for the regular school year.

“We knew continuity of services was our greatest need; we have discussed this with staff for a long time. ARP-HCY funds will help provide a place for families to access support and services during the summer months when they would otherwise lose that connection to school.”

Robin Dexter, Associate Superintendent
EdAdvance is one of Connecticut’s six Regional Educational Service Centers, and serves Western Connecticut. EdAdvance is using ARP-HCY funds to increase staffing capacity. It will be hiring a part-time case manager, who will focus on outreach to youth experiencing homelessness, and will provide assistance to families experiencing homelessness seeking affordable housing. EdAdvance also will be hiring an early childhood specialist to do community outreach and enroll young children experiencing homelessness in school, early intervention programs, and other early childhood programs. This addresses needs determined in visits to domestic violence shelters and the local home-visiting program, which revealed increased numbers of young children experiencing homelessness. In addition to these positions, EdAdvance will be hiring a part-time van driver to help meet the growing transportation needs of McKinney-Vento students, starting in the fall.

EdAdvance also used ARP-HCY funds to install WiFi routers in nearby shelters, as it was discovered that regular school-provided hotspots were not sufficient to meet the connectivity needs of families in shelters. ARP-HCY will also continue to be used to provide other services, such as emergency hotel stays, gas cards, camperships, and tutoring for students.

“Having additional ARP-HCY funds have been a gift to actually have resources at the ready for plans and the ability to make change with McKinney-Vento families by investing in staff to enhance outreach and support.”

Michelle Anderson, Director of Early Childhood and Family Programs
CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS, OHIO

Cincinnati Public Schools is currently serving 117 high school seniors experiencing homelessness who are working toward graduation. The district's goal for high school seniors generally is for them to graduate with a pathway - college, career, or military. Cincinnati Public Schools currently uses district funds to pay for a school counselor who specifically works with students experiencing homelessness to help each of them achieve one of these pathways.

However, once these students cross the stage at graduation, most lose access to school support staff. To address this loss of access, Cincinnati Public Schools is using ARP-HCY funds to hire a Postsecondary Transition Coordinator who will work with students still in high school and help connect them to supports in their first year after graduation. Cincinnati Public Schools has contracted with a community-based organization to hire for the position. The Coordinator will also provide support to students who experienced homelessness previously in their school career and help connect them to other supports in school.

In addition to the Coordinator position, Cincinnati Public Schools is using ARP-HCY funds to provide short-term emergency housing (1-3 days according to the State's determination). Prior to receiving ARP-HCY funds, the district engaged in fundraising to provide hotel stays for families waiting to get into shelter. With ARP-HCY funds, Cincinnati Public Schools is contracting with a community-based organization called UpSpring to arrange for such hotel stays, because UpSpring already has a contract with Marriott for discounted hotel room stays. In collaboration with district and UpSpring attorneys, a contract was put in place with a specific process and an open purchase order for providing district families with short-term emergency housing.

In addition to paying for short-term hotel stays, the district uses ARP-HCY funds to pay the salary of a Systems Housing Navigator. When families experiencing homelessness meet with the Navigator, she determines the number of days that are approved for a hotel stay and sends a referral to UpSpring and to the director of the community's largest shelter, if the family has no other housing arrangement. Once the family is in shelter, the Navigator follows up to see if the family will be housed through the shelter's rapid rehousing program or if the family is interested in a CMHA (housing authority) housing voucher. If they are interested in a housing voucher, the Navigator sends a referral. This process allows families to be housed by the time their shelter stay is up.

“"These funds are fantastic; we can do so much with ARP. I can be creative with ideas. I’ve never been busier because we are doing so much. It takes time to come up with the ideas, put them in place, and measure the impact. But I don’t want to spend the funds just to spend them. I want to build a sustainable program.

Rebeka Beach, Program Manager Project Connect
Cincinnati Public Schools uses Title I, Part A homeless reservations funds for a bilingual school social worker to do outreach and build awareness with the Spanish-speaking community. Cincinnati Public Schools has seen a significant increase in its population of English Learners (ELs), as well as an increase in the numbers of Spanish-speaking students identified under the McKinney-Vento Act. This increase is attributed to having a staff member who can break the language barrier and support families through enrollment and identification. Once these students are identified, they receive tutoring from a bilingual intervention specialist, funded by ARP-HCY funds, to decrease gaps in academic performance. The intervention specialist works with the students on reading, writing, listening, and speaking to help build English proficiency.
Using a combination of funding sources, North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) hired student navigators for each of the high schools. The student navigators support students experiencing homelessness through activities such as completing the FAFSA, assisting with plans for transitioning to higher education or other post-secondary activities, obtaining birth certificates, advocating with teachers, and providing support toward graduation. The student navigators helped to increase the graduation rate of students experiencing homelessness to 84%, surpassing the state graduation rate for all students.

In light of the success of the student navigators, NTPS used ARP-HCY funds to hire a bilingual student navigator for the Family and Youth Resource (FYR) Center. The FYR Center is a comprehensive support center for all families in need, 700 students and their families who are experiencing homelessness, and is a one-stop shop for connecting with support staff. In addition, community partners hold office hours in the FYR Center, and the student navigator meets families at the door and directly connects them to these resources.

Next year, ARP-HCY funds will sustain this position at the FYR Center, and the navigator will also work with the elementary schools and in the alternative high school.

In addition, ARP-HCY funds will be used next school year to hire a staff member to support all five middle schools. This staff member will work with student navigators to provide a soft hand-off to the high school student navigators when students experiencing homelessness transition from middle school to high school. Both the middle school staff and the student navigators at the high school are advocates for NTPS students experiencing homelessness, and they help students to see others as their advocates, too.

“\nWe can help each kid if we have enough people to do it. We’ve seen so much success with the student navigator positions, so expanding it only made sense. There’s more to do, it’s just a question of money and these funds make it possible. Even after the funds run out, the need for this support is clear.\n
Leslie Van Leishout, Director of Student Support
The Vancouver Public Schools (VPS) Homeless Outreach Promoting Education (HOPE) Program currently has 1,103 students identified under the McKinney-Vento Act as experiencing homelessness, with 256 of those students identified as unaccompanied homeless youth. When the district received ARP-HCY funds, its goal was to use the funds to increase identification, work on program capacity, and hire another staff member.

In the last few years, the number of identified unaccompanied homeless youth has skyrocketed. VPS used its three-year McKinney-Vento subgrant funds to hire a HOPE Program Advocate to serve all four of its high schools and the virtual learning academy. Using the data from the work the Advocate was doing, HOPE staff was able to show the need for increasing capacity and making caseload size more manageable. With ARP-HCY funds, VPS hired a second Unaccompanied Youth Advocate. The HOPE Program Advocates focus on having an increased presence in the schools and spending more time getting to know administrators, security staff, counselors, psychologists, interventionists, and enrollment, discipline, attendance, and additional support staff in school buildings.

With their presence in schools, the HOPE Program Advocates can now meet with unaccompanied homeless youth at the time of enrollment. At that time, the student is asked to respond to a housing questionnaire. If the student indicates that they are unaccompanied and homeless, the process begins for the student to be identified and qualified for assistance under the McKinney-Vento Act. One HOPE Program Advocate notes, “Having more visibility has made a tremendous impact with students. They have more trusting relationships with the HOPE program and administration. We are learning who our families are, and that they don’t just fit into the category of ‘homeless’.” HOPE Program Advocates also now are included in attendance, discipline, and Special Education meetings to provide more support for the homeless youth through these processes.

The district has a new superintendent, who has brought enhanced expectations that students experiencing homelessness will be acknowledged and served. There is an improved focus on building awareness, kindness, inclusion, and appreciation. Families are receiving compassionate support with a team that is committed to removing barriers.

“...The presence of the HOPE Program Advocates in the schools, who represent our program, has created an amazing collaboration with administration, who are now assisting the HOPE Program Advocates in supporting and identifying students who are experiencing homelessness. The capacity was impossible with only one advocate. The positions will become permanent because we can show the positive impact their work is having on our students. It’s a great addition to our program to have these ARP-HCY funds. The outcome has been very rewarding.

Melissa Newhouse, District Homeless and Foster Care Liaison

Tanisha Harris, Unaccompanied Youth Advocate
Akron Public Schools (APS) typically receives McKinney-Vento subgrant funds and has a robust program to support students experiencing homelessness, providing both intake staff to focus on identification and academic advocates for case management. APS used ESSER funds to increase its capacity to provide academic advocates to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

In deciding how to use ARP-HCY funds, APS prioritized sustainability in order to maintain programming when ARP-HCY funds are no longer available. APS used ARP-HCY I funds for supplies (such as hygiene products, clothing and food vouchers) to support attendance and engagement.

In addition, APS used ARP-HCY funds in contracting with the central intake office of the local United Way. With this contract, families have direct access to a housing navigator. The housing navigator also will be a point person for school staff when supporting families facing housing instability. APS will collect and analyze data to evaluate this partnership, and will pursue opportunities for funding through the United Way after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.

As a result of the challenges of identification during the pandemic, APS, like many school districts across the nation, saw a decrease in the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness. Therefore, APS also will use ARP-HCY funds for targeted marketing. APS has a contract with a local billboard company for several four-week periods of advertising (including at the beginning of the school year) to increase awareness and the identification of students.

In addition, ARP-HCY II funds will be used for professional development for staff. Using McKinney-Vento subgrant carryover funds, APS initiated the development of an online program to provide a simulation of homelessness and housing instability. ARP-HCY II funds will support the completion of the project and its use in schools and the community.

APS also is using ARP-HCY II funds in the development of two important new partnerships to meet the needs of children and youth.
First, APS is partnering with Legal Aid to support families in navigating and working through legal issues relating to housing and eviction. APS will conduct an assessment for families needing services, and refer them to the Legal Aid office for continuing work. This partnership will include both attorney hours and training for staff.

Second, in addition to the APS partnership with Head Start, APS will begin to provide SPARK, a preschool program designed to support the kindergarten readiness of 3- and 4-year-olds. Through SPARK, a part-time staff person will provide curriculum and support twice a month in the homes of 25 early learners each year. Using data to demonstrate need and effectiveness, APS will look for funding sources through community partnerships to continue SPARK after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.
The Anchorage School District has identified 1,635 students as experiencing homelessness. When the Child In Transition (CIT) Program received ARP-HCY I funds, CIT program staff immediately focused on the need for increased connectivity and purchased 20 additional hotspots to ensure that students who missed school due to COVID-19 exposure or quarantine were still able to connect to in-person school.

In addition, ARP-HCY I funds were earmarked for car repairs. For families transporting students to school, the district found that providing often-needed car repairs was more economical than providing cab services, ultimately saving the district money on transportation.

When a family needing car repairs reaches out to CIT program staff, CIT program staff determines if car repairs will be feasible, and asks the family or youth to get an estimate. The CIT program will pay approximately $200 of car repair costs (adjusted on a case-by-case basis), and families are asked to pay a portion of the expense. Once the repair is completed, CIT staff use a district credit card to pay the cost, submitting receipts with the business name and amount to the district’s business office. Because community donations have been used to meet this need in the past, the business office already has processes in place for this.

In addition, CIT program staff agreed with English Learner staff to fund eight Community Counselor positions in the district’s eight high schools. The Community Counselor positions are funded 50% with ARP-HCY Part II and 50% with the district’s English Learner funds. With seven of the positions hired so far, the Community Counselors will be responsible to connect with students and families, support identification efforts, check attendance and grades, monitor and support academic progress, and facilitate referrals with community partners. With the support of these Community Counselor positions, it is hoped that students will make tangible gains, allowing the CIT program to collect data to show the need to fund these positions after ARP-HCY funds are no longer available.

“When we found out we were getting ARP-HCY funds, we were overjoyed and thankful that Senator Murkowski secured these funds. We’ve been looking for additional funding for a long time. We immediately started brainstorming the best way to use these funds to support our students and families. It’s been a roller-coaster, but we believe these funds will really help us make a difference.”

Dave Mayo-Kiely, Child In Transition Program Coordinator
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. 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.

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