Lack of transportation is a tremendous obstacle to regular school attendance and success for children and youth experiencing homelessness. They have little control over where they are staying, and can be forced to leave at a moment’s notice. As a result, they move frequently. Families and youth experiencing homelessness also have limited funds for cars, car repairs, auto insurance, gas, or public transportation. Without reliable transportation, regular school attendance is impossible, and contributes to high chronic absence rates among these students; in fact, the chronic absence rate of students experiencing homelessness is twice the rate of other students, and may be a significant factor driving chronic absence rates in districts, particularly if unidentified and unaddressed.

Federal law (the McKinney-Vento Act) requires school districts to remove barriers to enrollment and retention, including transportation barriers. Even when McKinney-Vento families and youth move outside of district boundaries, they are entitled to transportation in order to continue attending their school of origin, if it is in their best interest.

The U.S. Department of Education’s (ED) guidance makes clear that ARP-HCY funds may be used to provide transportation to enable children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities. The guidance states that ARP-HCY funds may be used to purchase vehicles for the specialized transportation for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Funds may also be used for providing gas reimbursement for parents and youth, purchasing prepaid gas cards, and paying for limited car repairs when reasonable and necessary. In addition, the ED has clarified that ARP-HCY funds may be used for transportation for early childhood education and college readiness activities.

Strategies

In response to specific requests from state and local educational agencies, ED has approved many flexible transportation-related uses of funds if it is reasonable and necessary in a particular context, including:

- Gas cards
- Car repairs
- Auto insurance
- Ride shares
- Drivers’ education
- The purchase of vehicles (for the school district)
- Bicycles
- Transportation coordinators

Some school districts have found that using ARP-HCY funds for items such as car repairs and gas cards is particularly cost effective for the student and the district. Similarly, using ARP-HCY funds for longer-term investments like purchasing a vehicle for the purpose of transporting students experiencing homelessness helps ensure that school attendance is immediate and uninterrupted. These school districts have tackled concerns about tracking, liability, and potential misuse to maximize the power of ARP-HCY to improve attendance and participation, which are prerequisites for academic success.

💡 Local Spotlights: Using ARP-HCY to Meet Transportation Needs

**Car Repairs: Anchorage School District, AK**

The Anchorage School District found that paying for car repairs for families or youth who have cars is more economical than providing cab services. If a family reaches out to the homeless education program, staff determine if car repairs are feasible, and ask the family or youth to obtain an estimate. The program will pay approximately $200 in 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, staff use a school district credit card to pay the cost, submitting receipts with the car repair business name and amount to the district’s business office.

**Vehicle Purchase: Lawton Public Schools, OK**

Prior to ARP-HCY, Lawton Public Schools employed traveling counselors to provide interim transportation so that students did not miss school during the time between requesting transportation and obtaining it. However, variation in counselors schedules made these arrangements unreliable. To improve consistency of interim transportation, the district used ARP-HCY funds to purchase a vehicle. The vehicle also will be used for virtual students experiencing homelessness to access school services, for “home” visits to students and families, and to transport students to health services.

**Gas Cards: Stockton Unified School District, CA**

Stockton Unified School District uses gas debit cards, in conjunction with a verification of attendance and receipts. Families sign an agreement and submit receipts. The school district staff monitors attendance to ensure gas cards are used for school transportation.

❄ Additional Resources

- [Allowable and Strategic uses of American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Funds (ARP-HCY)](#)
REMINDER: 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.” Broad categories included in ED guidance include:

- Providing wrap-around services (which could be provided in collaboration with and/or through contracts with community-based organizations, and could include academic supports, trauma-informed care, social-emotional support, and mental health services);
- Purchasing needed supplies (e.g., personal protective equipment, eyeglasses, school supplies, personal care items);
- Providing transportation to enable children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities;
- Purchasing cell phones or other technological devices for unaccompanied, homeless children and youth to enable such children and youth to attend school and fully participate in school activities;
- Providing access to reliable, high-speed internet for students through the purchase of internet-connected devices/equipment, mobile hotspots, wireless service plans, or installation of Community Wi-Fi Hotspots (e.g., at homeless shelters), especially in underserved communities;
- Paying for short-term, temporary housing (e.g., a few days in a motel) when such emergency housing is the only reasonable option for COVID-safe temporary housing and when necessary to enable the homeless children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities (including summer school); and
- Providing store cards/prepaid debit cards to purchase materials necessary for students to participate fully in school activities.”

In addition, LEAs may use funds for any of the sixteen uses permitted by the McKinney-Vento Act (42 U.S.C. 11433(d)).

**Series: Flexing the Flexibility of ARP-HCY Funding**

- #1: Removing Barriers with Store Cards and Pre-Paid Debit Cards
- #2: Transportation
- #3: Emergency Motel Stays
- #4: Expanding Staff Capacity
- #5: Transition from High School to Postsecondary Education
- #6: Early Childhood
#7: Supporting Immigrant Students