Flexing the Flexibility of ARP-HCY:  
#6 Early Childhood

Homelessness is a traumatic experience with long-term consequences, particularly for young children in their most critical stages of development. Approximately 1 million children under the age of six experienced homelessness in 2020-2021, yet homelessness among young children is hidden. It includes a range of living situations:

- a six-month-old living in a car with her family;
- a family of five squeezed into a motel room;
- a newborn in an emergency shelter;
- a two-year-old on a series of floors next to a series of couches, moving with his mother from place to place as she stays with anyone who will take them in.

Lack of shelter, fear of having children removed from parental custody, and restrictive eligibility criteria for housing programs mean that most young children experiencing homelessness stay in places that are not easily identified. Ensuring young children experiencing homelessness are connected to early childhood development opportunities is critical and can help mitigate the traumatic, often long-term impacts of homelessness. K12 school districts have a unique role to play in identifying and referring younger siblings of school aged children to high-quality early childhood development programs.

**ARP-HCY Funds Are Uniquely Flexible.** States and districts may use ARP-HCY funds for any of the allowable activities under the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. In addition, the U.S Department of Education has approved other uses of ARP-HCY funding, which allows for supports for Early Childhood Education.

**Strategies**

School districts have used the following strategies:

- Add hours to increase capacity of staff to identify young children and ensure families with young children are enrolled in high quality early learning programs
- Partner with Head Start and Early Head Start to develop a referral system so that liaisons can refer younger siblings experiencing homelessness for enrollment
- Conduct outreach during the summer for increased access to screenings and enrollment in early intervention services,
- Increase joint training opportunities for both early childhood and K12 liaisons and educators to come together and learn more about the impacts of homelessness on
young children, educational services and programs offered, and how they can work together to increase identification and referrals.

- Revise enrollment forms, questionnaires, and information to include questions about younger siblings

States have used the following strategies:

- Hire a statewide early childhood homelessness navigator, to serve as a link between early childhood programs and K12 school districts, ensuring younger siblings are being identified and referred;
- Contract with the state Head Start Collaboration Office to increase identification and referrals, provide more cross-system training opportunities, and improve data collection and sharing;
- Conduct an early childhood needs assessment that analyzes existing data and practices for identifying and referring young children experiencing homelessness, and identifies areas where state agencies can take action for improvement.

.Forms/Procedures

- Referring Young Children to Early Childhood Development Programs: Checklist for Homeless Liaisons

💡 Local Spotlights: Using ARP-HCY for Early Childhood

Grand Island Public Schools, Nebraska

When Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) received ARP-HCY funds, the district looked at their needs and quickly recognized supporting younger children experiencing homelessness during the summer was at the top of their priority list. GIPS currently has a Community Services Navigator who works with students and families identified under McKinney-Vento at the district’s Early Learning Center. With ARP-HCY Part I funds, the bilingual parent liaison will also be able to support the district’s youngest learners and their families over the summer, helping ensure they have access to food, clothing, summer programming opportunities, navigating connections to community partners, and helping ensure students and families experiencing homelessness have summer support.

EdAdvance, Torrington, Connecticut

EdAdvance is one of Connecticut’s six Regional Educational Service Centers, and serves Western Connecticut. In addition to using ARP-HCY funds to increase staffing capacity, by hiring a part-time youth outreach case manager, EdAdvance also will be hiring an early childhood specialist. This specialist will conduct community outreach and enroll young children
Early Childhood experiences 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 K-12 McKinney-Vento students, starting in the fall.

“Having additional ARP-HCY funds has 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, EdAdvance

Regional Office of Education #3, Illinois

Illinois’ Regional Offices of Education partner with the Illinois State Board of Education to provide support services to school districts across the state. ROE #3 serves school districts across five counties and dedicated a portion of its ARP-HCY allocation towards increasing the identification and referral of young children experiencing homelessness. It hosted a regional conference targeted towards early childhood educators, for raising awareness of homelessness among young children and the importance of prompt identification.

Akron Public Schools, Ohio

Akron Public Schools (APS) will partner with SPARK, a home visiting program designed to support the Kindergarten readiness of 3 and 4 year olds and help parents learn how to engage their child’s learning at home. Through SPARK, a part-time staff person will provide curriculum and support to children and their parents 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.

💡 State Spotlights: Using ARP-HCY for Early Childhood

Early Learning Navigator, Hawaii

The Hawaii Department of Education used ARP-HCY funds to hire a full-time Early Learning Navigator. The navigator, whose role is focused on connecting younger children experiencing homelessness with early childhood programs, will emphasize the identification of students ages 0-5 in order to connect them with early education and high-quality childcare services and to provide support to families in the transition to kindergarten. The Early Learning Navigator serves as a bridge between programs like Head Start and Early Head Start and the state’s homeless education liaisons.
Additional Resources

- Supporting Young Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness with American Rescue Plan Act Funds
- Allowable and Strategic uses of American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Funds (ARP-HCY)
- Progress and Promise: An Early Look at COVID Relief Funds for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

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