Flexing the Flexibility of ARP-HCY:  
Supporting Immigrant Students

School districts across the country are witnessing increasing numbers of immigrant children and youth, many of whom are staying in situations that meet the definition of homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. For example:

- Staying in rented closet space on a rotating basis with other families
- Sleeping on cots in a large-scale immigrant holding center
- Unsheltered, having been transported to a new city or state with no connections or resources, and sleeping on sidewalks in front of shelters or churches, in hospital hallways, and in bus stations
- Staying with other immigrant friends, family members, or sponsors in temporary, overcrowded situations because there is nowhere else to stay

In addition to experiencing homelessness, these children, youth, and families have often endured trauma during their immigration, and face numerous barriers enrolling and succeeding in school. They may feel fearful as they navigate a new country, new language, and new educational system, and be hesitant to share information about living situations. Building trust with immigrant families is critical to ensuring identification and support.

**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 that can help meet the unique needs of immigrant children and youth experiencing homelessness.

**Strategies**

School districts have used the following strategies to assist immigrant students experiencing homelessness:

- Add capacity by hiring or adding hours to the position of a bilingual parent liaison to provide support and services over the summer
- Add extended contract hours for social workers to connect to community resources to support the whole family
- Pay for translated (written) materials, as well as (oral) interpreters to review information
- Partner with a community-based organization to increase identification, enrollment, and retention of immigrant students.
- Provide wraparound services to navigate housing resources.
• Provide mental health support to process immigration trauma

💡 Local Spotlights: Using ARP-HCY to Support Immigrant Students

**Grand Island Public Schools, Nebraska**

When Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) received ARP-HCY funds, the district looked at their greatest needs and quickly recognized supporting students experiencing homelessness during the summer was at the top of their priority list. Funded with ARP-HCY Part I, a bilingual parent liaison will be able to support the district's youngest learners and their families over the summer, helping ensure they have access to food, clothing, and summer programming opportunities, and navigating connections to community partners. When possible, districts should make every effort to hire a parent who has been through the immigration experience, which can help build trust and strong relationships with other families.

**South Portland School Department, Maine**

In South Portland, Maine, approximately 90% of the students identified as experiencing homelessness are multilingual learners in their first U.S. school setting. South Portland has worked hard to train enrollment staff on following the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act by enrolling immigrant students who lack school records, as well as ensuring translations and other culturally responsive services. The district funds two social workers to work specifically with McKinney-Vento students, paying for part of one social worker’s salary with ARP-HCY funds. These social workers partner with building points of contact to support the entire family across all grade spans, including a specific focus on working with immigrant families.

**Frederick County Public Schools, Maryland**

Using ARP-HCY funds, Frederick County Public Schools is working with a community-based organization called Spanish Speaking Community of Maryland (SSCM) to hire a staff member to work as a bilingual community-based McKinney-Vento liaison. The liaison is responsible for supporting the identification, enrollment, and retention of Frederick County Public School students who are identified as experiencing homelessness. The SSCM McKinney-Vento liaison also works to connect students to services, specifically immigration and housing, along with other wraparound services.

[SSCM Brochure English](#)
[SSCM Brochure Spanish](#)
Monte del Sol Charter School, New Mexico

When the application process for rental assistance became 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 Navigator is primarily working on housing navigation, helping families apply for state rental and utility assistance. In addition, the Navigator assists with identification of students because of the relationships that have been established. Families trust her with information about their living situations that they don’t feel comfortable sharing with others. The Navigator is savvy in knowing how to help 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.

Shakopee Public Schools, Minnesota

Shakopee Public Schools (SPS) is experiencing an increase in unaccompanied youth immigrating from Central America. These youth have significant mental health needs, from traveling alone to the U.S. and navigating the trauma of their immigration experience. The district chose to use ARP-HCY funds to contract with an individual therapist previously connected to the district. The therapist began to meet in small groups with a total of 15 immigrant youth experiencing homelessness. The groups addressed the trauma of their immigration experience, offered support for self-care, and provided space to manage and work through trauma. The district plans to expand this support to students in middle school, and is actively working to braid funding sources to continue to provide mental health support after ARP-HCY, in addition to actively recruiting additional bilingual staff.

💡 Additional Resources

- Resources to Support Immigrant and Migrant Students Experiencing Homelessness
- 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)).