

Store Cards and Strategies

Monitoring and Maximizing the Educational Benefits of Store cards Acquired through ARP-HCY Funds

Prepaid Store, Gas, and Debit Cards are allowable uses of American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds under the U.S. Department of Education's [federal guidance](#). As a reminder, these funds must be obligated by September 30, 2024, and fully expended and drawn down by the project period liquidation deadline of October 30, 2024.

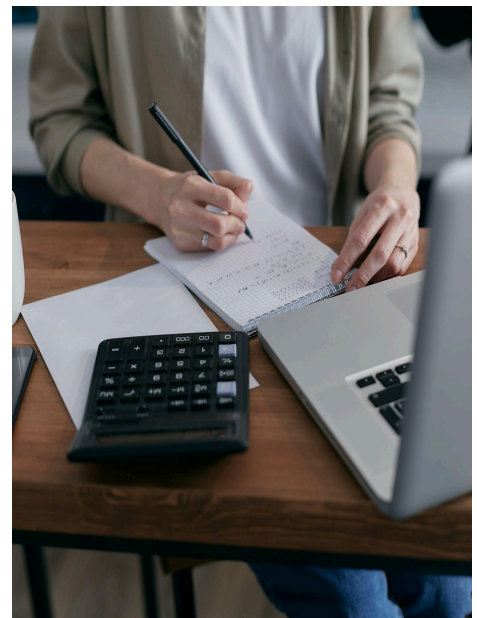
Prepaid store, gas, and debit cards are effective ways to help children and youth experiencing homelessness meet their basic needs and improve attendance. Furthermore, strategic internal procurement and tracking processes may eliminate the need to make multiple trips to stores to purchase individual items and free up staff capacity to meet and build strong relationships with students and families experiencing homelessness.

This resource will provide best practices for purchasing, tracking, and leveraging store cards to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. For additional information and resources on ARP-HCY funds, including an archived webinar on store cards, visit our [webpage](#).

Best Practices for Purchasing Cards

Consider what quantity and purchasing method is most appropriate for the size of your LEA and the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness in your community. Strategies include:

- ❖ Conducting a **needs assessment** to determine what type(s) of cards (store cards, gas cards, laundry cards, etc.) will be most effective to meet student needs.
- ❖ Purchasing **small quantities of cards and following up with the recipients** to determine if they were effective in meeting basic needs.
- ❖ Purchasing **cards in bulk** through [order forms](#) or from [wholesale retailers](#) to save time and capacity.
- ❖ **Evaluate the benefits of purchasing store cards** to obtain a variety of basic need items, knowing that they can be used through January 2025, **rather than stocking up a singular item**.



Best Practices for Tracking Cards

The U.S. Department of Education and the New York State Education Department have not prescribed a specific method for tracking prepaid store, gas, and debit cards. However, both agencies do ask that LEAs have strong internal controls. Strategies Include:

- ❖ Developing **agreement forms** to ensure students and families are aware of the items that may and may not be purchased as well as other LEA policies around store cards.
- ❖ Obtaining **charitable cards** with limited purchasing power to prevent misuse.
- ❖ Collecting receipts from students and families. Alternatively, collecting receipts from LEA staff who may use store cards to purchase items on behalf of students and families.
- ❖ Developing an **internal tracking system** that considers the time and capacity of McKinney-Vento liaisons and other LEA staff; the monitoring needs of school finance offices; and is trauma-sensitive and mindful of the competing needs of students and families experiencing homelessness.

Best Practices for Leveraging Cards to Improve Academic Outcomes

The purpose of ARP-HCY funds is to improve the academic outcomes of students experiencing homelessness to meet or exceed pre-pandemic achievement. Furthermore, given that these are one-time funds, it is important to measure the impact of all activities realized with ARP-HCY funds, including prepaid store, gas, and debit cards. This information can help LEAs evaluate which initiatives have been most impactful and are worth sustaining after ARP-HCY funds are exhausted. Strategies include:

- ❖ Setting up meetings with students and families and McKinney-Vento Liaisons and or school social workers when distributing store cards to build relationships and connect them with wrap-around supports to support long-term academic achievement.
- ❖ Developing a tracking system that not only meets fiscal needs but also tracks student-level data, such as attendance records, to measure academic impact.

LEA Spotlight:

Greece CSD received feedback from students and families that the lack of clean clothes was hindering regular attendance. To address this concern, the district established a partnership with a local laundromat, utilizing ARP-HCY funds. The laundromat created prepaid store cards with distinct codes, allowing students and families to load them onto their app, covering the expenses to use washers and dryers.

"I've had parents tell me it allows them to feel like everybody else in the laundromat nobody really knows how you're paying on your app. I think there's some dignity and some pride that goes with that, that feels good."

-Jacqueline Gigliotta, McKinney-Vento Liaison