

Reducing Chronic Absence for Students Experiencing Homelessness

With ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A Funds

Public schools identified over 1.2 million children and youth experiencing homelessness in the 2021-2022 school year, an increase of ten percent from the previous year. Children and youth without safe, stable housing face numerous barriers to regular school attendance, including high mobility, traumatic events, and lack of transportation, clothing, hygiene products, and other basic needs. **More than half (52%) of students experiencing homelessness in the 2021-2022 school year were chronically absent**, a rate that is 22 percentage points higher than other students.

Pandemic relief funding specifically targeted to student homelessness (American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth, or ARP-HCY funding) can be used in flexible ways to address the root causes of chronic absence.

While ARP-HCY funds **must be obligated by September 30, 2024**, there is still time to leverage these funds to identify students who are experiencing homelessness and remove barriers to their school attendance. In addition, other federal funds – including McKinney-Vento **Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funds**, and funding that local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to reserve for homeless students under **Title I Part A** – may support many of these same activities.

Using ARP-HCY Funds to Identify Homeless Students and Increase Attendance

IDENTIFICATION + OUTREACH

Families and youth who don't know they have a right to enroll in school without a permanent address or typical paperwork may simply give up on school. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used for posters and other awareness-building materials and campaigns; translations of those materials into other languages; and professional development for educators to help recognize **the signs and potential indicators of homelessness**. These funds also may support dedicated staff time for community outreach and engagement, including supporting the salary of the McKinney-Vento school district homeless liaison.

TRANSPORTATION

Lack of transportation is one of the biggest barriers to regular school attendance for students experiencing homelessness. Federal law requires schools to provide **transportation** to facilitate school stability and remove transportation barriers to enrollment and retention. If reasonable and necessary, ARP-HCY and EHCY funds can be used to meet transportation needs through the following allowable activities.

- Purchasing vehicles for school districts
- Purchasing gas cards, bikes, and public transit passes for students
- Paying for car repairs
- Providing stipends or extending hours for drivers and/or transportation coordinators
- Contracting with rideshare and other third-party transportation providers

In addition, Title I Part A funds reserved to serve students experiencing homelessness also may be used to defray the cost of transportation to the school of origin.

SHORT-TERM MOTEL STAYS

Many communities lack shelters, or their shelters may be full, or shelter policies may separate family members. In these situations, motels stays for a short period of time can increase safety and attendance, *and* help bridge the gap until longer-term housing arrangements can be made. Federal guidance permits ARP-HCY funds to be used for short-term motel stays as a last resort when other funding sources are not available through collaboration and coordination with local housing providers, local government agencies, or nonprofits that support families and youth experiencing homelessness.

COMMUNICATION

Families and youth who experience homelessness move frequently, abruptly, and often with little advance notice. They may not have a way to communicate with school staff about these moves and what they need to continue to attend school. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to purchase cell phones, hot spots, and wireless service plans to increase communication between families, youth, and schools.

MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Children and youth who are experiencing homelessness often miss school because they lack clothing and shoes, or because they lack hygiene items or access to places to shower or do laundry. These students also may be absent because their parents – or in the case of unaccompanied youth, youth themselves – don't know where they are going to stay and therefore prioritize finding safe shelter. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to help meet some of these basic needs in order for students to come to school and be ready to learn.

STORE CARDS + PREPAID DEBIT CARDS

Students or families can use these to purchase materials necessary for a student experiencing homelessness to participate fully in school. School district homeless liaisons report that store cards purchased with ARP-HCY and EHCY funds also have proven to be a powerful way to build trust and re-engage parents and youth.

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to purchase school supplies for students experiencing homelessness, and pay for fees for students to participate in educational and extracurricular activities.

MENTORS AND OTHER SUPPORTIVE ADULTS

Lack of meaningful relationships with adults contributes to isolation and disengagement, and therefore also school absence. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to pay stipends for mentors, increase staff capacity by extending contract hours, and contract with community-based organizations for afterschool and summer school programs.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Some common platforms for monitoring attendance, such as PowerSchool Infinite Campus, or Aeries, can be powerful tools for identifying homelessness as a cause of absence, and providing tailored interventions. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to purchase homelessness-specific modules to upgrade and integrate into existing systems.

MENTAL HEALTH

Homelessness is caused by traumatic events, and is itself a traumatic experience, that can lead to isolation, disengagement, and harm. ARP-HCY, EHCY, and Title I Part A funds can be used to increase counseling support for homeless students, either directly or by contracting with community-based providers.

THESE EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATE SOME, BUT NOT ALL, OF THE WAYS IN WHICH ARP-HCY, EHCY, AND TITLE I PART A FUNDS CAN BE USED TO INCREASE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

To find out if your school district received ARP-HCY funds or EHCY funds, contact your **State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth**. For more information, about the requirement for local educational agencies to set aside Title I Part A funds to serve students experiencing homelessness, see **this resource**.

Additional Resources

- [U.S. Department of Education Letter to Chief State School Officers on allowable use of ARP-HCY Funds, September 2023](#)
- [Two-page overview](#) of allowable ARP-HCY uses of funds
- Overview of [Title I Part A requirements](#) to reserve funds to serve students experiencing homelessness, and [excerpt from federal guidance on allowable uses of Title I Part A funds](#) to serve students experiencing homelessness.
- [McKinney-Vento Act Quick Reference](#)
- [Flexing the Flexibility series](#). Seven short briefs with specific examples of how school districts are using these funds for these purposes.
- SHC's [ARP-HCY page](#) has sample forms, MOUs, and other resources.