

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS DURING SCHOOL BUILDING CLOSURES

Given the challenges of mobility, deep poverty, and trauma, keeping in touch with students and families experiencing homelessness can be a challenge in the best of times. With schools buildings and early childhood programs closed, and students and families moving even more frequently due to COVID-19, maintaining connections is even more difficult. At the same time, the anticipated increase in homelessness over the coming months makes keeping in touch more important than ever. This checklist offers some strategies that liaisons, schools, and early childhood programs can use to keep in touch with students and families.

Center Equity. Keeping in touch with Black, Latinx, and Native students requires extra sensitivity and focused strategies. Parents of color are more likely to have had their own negative experiences with schools that may affect their comfort in communicating with schools, and are more likely to face language barriers. Liaisons, social workers, counselors, and teachers may be more effective reaching out to parents and students of color than administrators, attendance officers, or other staff who could be interpreted as threatening. ELL staff are ideal for connecting with parents and students who are recent immigrants, while Native American staff can help connect with Native students and families. Culturally-specific community agencies also can provide support.

- Augment the local educational agency homeless liaison's capacity to do outreach.
 - Increase liaisons' dedicated hours to homeless-related activities, through CARES Act funds or increasing the Title I, Part A homeless set-aside.
 - Enlist other school staff, such as counselors, paraprofessionals, social workers, and teachers, to reach out to students experiencing homelessness.

- Use all available means of communication to reach families and students: Email, phone, texting, regular mail, Facebook, Twitter, Remind, Instagram, Snapchat, GroupMe, "curbside" home visits, etc.



WHAT FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE FOR THESE ACTIVITIES?

- Title I, Part A funds, including both the homeless set-aside and regular Title I funds
- McKinney-Vento funds
- Supplemental federal funds available through the CARES Act
- Other local educational agency and early childhood program funds
- Philanthropic and community support

- When families and students don't respond, don't give up. Reach out to emergency contacts and other students to ask if they have updated contact information, or if they can find students on social media and urge them to contact the school.
- Reach out to unaccompanied youth directly. Even if a parent's contact information is in the school data system, remember that most unaccompanied youth have no contact with parents or guardians.
- Once you connect with a parent or youth, stay in touch on a regular schedule. Use "check-in" forms to guide weekly conversations with students and families. Begin by telling students they're missed, and then inquire about supports they might need to stay safe, healthy, and engaged in school and early childhood programs.
- Post flyers, brochures, and posters in the community where students and parents might see them, even if those locations are different due to COVID-19. For example, while campgrounds, motels, libraries and laundromats continue to be important places to post information, grocery stores and pharmacies might be even more essential locations for such information at this time.
- Visit local motels and campgrounds where families experiencing homelessness sometimes stay, placing flyers on vehicle windows or under doors. Maintain appropriate social distancing and other safety precautions.

- Create user-friendly websites and Facebook pages with clear information about community resources, food distribution, and distance learning, including how to obtain devices and internet connectivity.
- Set up a phone hotline for assistance with any needs.
- When delivering food or learning packets, ask about other needs and encourage families and students to keep in touch. Let them know they are missed, and that schools and early childhood programs are ready and able to help them.
- Provide parents and youth with the technology they need to stay in touch, such as pre-paid cell phones.
- Ask local radio and TV stations to encourage parents and students to connect with schools and early childhood programs, emphasizing the support available and talking about McKinney-Vento services during the news and commercial breaks.