

JULY 2020



# IDENTIFYING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS DURING SCHOOL BUILDING CLOSURES



With many school buildings completely or largely closed this fall, identifying students experiencing homelessness will require revisions to typical techniques. The anticipated increase in homelessness due to increased unemployment, family stress, and other factors also will complicate identification efforts. This checklist offers some strategies to promote robust identification of students experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.

- Ensure liaisons have adequate capacity to identify McKinney-Vento students.
  - Use a [simple tool](#) to assess liaison capacity.
  - Use [COVID-19 relief funding](#) and [Title I, Part A funding](#) to increase liaison capacity.
  - Designate school building-level liaisons to increase the LEA's overall capacity to respond to homelessness.
  - Use short [training materials](#) to ensure new district and building-level liaisons are prepared to discharge their duties. Many schools and districts are reporting increased staff turnover due to COVID-19 and economic stressors.
  
- As a first step, reach out to families and youth identified as homeless last school year. Given the economic impacts of COVID-19, they are more likely than usual to continue to experience homelessness this school year.
  
- Ensure that [trained](#) staff are available to connect with McKinney-Vento families and students at the start of the new school year, including registrars, other enrollment personnel, and teachers.

□ **Take serious, deliberate steps to ensure racial and ethnic equity in identification and reach out to culturally-specific organizations.**

- Disproportionate, and sometimes fatal, involvement with law enforcement and child protective services may prevent Black students and families from revealing homelessness for fear of involvement with those systems. Undocumented students and families, and even many with legal visas, are increasingly afraid to discuss housing needs with public agencies like schools. Sensitive, non-threatening conversations are essential.
- Language barriers can make online systems, housing questionnaires, and other identification processes difficult for some parents and youth of color to understand. Ensure translated materials are readily available and engage bilingual staff to communicate with families.
- Native American students and families may not recognize McKinney-Vento living situations as homelessness. Many also continue to suffer from historical trauma of being forced into abusive boarding schools. As recently as the 1970s, the United States education system was being used to strip culture from Native children. Clear and trauma-informed explanations of the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness, and supportive services available, are essential.

- Embed questions and information about homelessness in all school and district outreach efforts, including: food pick-up or delivery; mailing of learning packets; emails or other communications that are going out to all parents/students; school/district automated calling systems; and the school/district website, Facebook page, and other social media. Many new families and youth are likely to fall into homelessness due to current economic stressors. It is more important than ever to ensure that all parents and students know about McKinney-Vento and related rights.
- Embed questions and information about homelessness in all school enrollment documents, including online enrollment systems.



Ensure online enrollment systems are fully accessible to families and students experiencing homelessness. Use our guide to [Removing Barriers to Online Enrollment](#).

## STRATEGIES FROM A MCKINNEY-VENTO LIAISON IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

**Taylor Paquette, McKinney-Vento liaison in Nashua School District, NH**, is training staff, including teachers, on signs of potential homelessness in the specific context of distance learning:

- Frequent changes in the background of where the student is working; the student appears to be changing location frequently
- Many different people in the background, beyond just the student's immediate family
- Background in a motel/hotel
- Background in public areas
- Student/parent unreachable for periods of time
- Difficulty participating in scheduled class times/ completing assignments

- Post flyers, brochures, and posters in the community where students and parents might see them, such as campgrounds, motels, libraries, laundromats, grocery stores, and pharmacies.
- Engage all your community partners: food banks, laundromats, legal services, faith communities, motels, campgrounds, shelters, Boys and Girls clubs, LGBTQ youth organizations, culturally-specific organizations, clinics serving low-income families, public benefits offices, 211, and others.
  - Ask community partners to use an online referral form, that can be completed and submitted via a googledoc or email, to connect families and youth to McKinney-Vento liaisons.
- Connect with your local eviction court and sheriff's offices to ask them to provide McKinney-Vento information to families who are evicted.
- Ask local radio and TV news stations to talk about McKinney-Vento services in the news and during commercial breaks, and to provide the liaison's contact information.