

District Checklist: Taking Full Advantage of American Rescue Plan Funds to Identify and Support Students Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

In this latest installment of the [AASA Learning Recovery & Redesign Guidance](#), [SchoolHouse Connection](#) provides an actionable checklist designed to help district leaders take full advantage of new and existing federal resources to meet the significant needs—greatly exacerbated by the pandemic—of students experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

☐ **URGENT ACTION ITEM: Accept your district's ARP-HCY funds!**

As more states are set to distribute to school districts new federal funds targeted at supporting students experiencing homelessness (specifically, ARP-HCY part II funds), it is imperative that you accept them. This Checklist will help you make effective use of these additional dollars.

NOTE: If you have already declined your district's share of ARP-HCY funds for whatever reason, please keep reading as the Checklist items mostly apply to other resources you can still use to support these students!

A CALL TO ACTION: School leaders should strategically leverage **both** general ARP ESSER funds and the dedicated American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds to locate, engage, maintain connection with, and support children and youth experiencing homelessness.

This document provides considerations specifically for district superintendents and offers ideas for strategically using ARP-HCY funds (and other federal resources) to identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. The Checklist includes the following three major actions that every district should complete (with a total of eight related steps to take under them):

- ☐ **ACTION #1: Consult with your homeless education liaison (+3 steps)**
- ☐ **ACTION #2: Assess your existing plans for using relief funds (+2 steps)**
- ☐ **ACTION #3: Create a plan based on student needs (+3 steps)**

Without specific, intentional action and directed funding, these students—who are disproportionately students with disabilities, English learners, and students of color—are likely to continue to struggle to enroll, attend, and succeed in school.

BACKGROUND: The American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) provided nearly \$123 billion in aid for K-12 education through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), including specific guidelines for using the funds to support [students experiencing homelessness and other marginalized student groups](#). ARP also includes the ARP-HCY fund of an additional \$800 million specifically dedicated to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including through wrap-around services. A summary of the timing, allocation, and uses of these targeted funds is [here](#).

ARP-HCY funds are available to all school districts, based on the district's Title I allocation and the number of students previously identified as experiencing homelessness. By contrast (due to inadequate federal funding), only one quarter of school districts receive McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) sub-grant funds. For more information, please see appendix on page 5.

I already receive McKinney-Vento EHCY funds, so why do I also need ARP-HCY funds?

COVID-19 has increased the number of students experiencing homelessness and heightened their needs as well. ARP-HCY funds can help districts meet these broader and deeper needs. Additionally, ARP-HCY funds can be used very flexibly 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,” in addition to the sixteen allowable activities under McKinney-Vento. For example, some districts are using ARP-HCY funds to pay for car repairs, or short motel stays.

[Learn more about Allowable and Strategic Uses of ARP-HCY Funds.](#)

Don't have a lot of identified students, or worried that your ARP-HCY allocation will not be enough to make a difference?

Even in smaller contexts, the ARP-HCY funds can be used strategically to make an important difference. Consider partnering with other districts to pool resources and meet regional needs. ARP explicitly allows districts receiving less than \$5,000 in ARP-HCY funds to [form a consortium](#) with other districts to combine and maximize allocations.

THE CHECKLIST

☐ ACTION #1: CONSULT WITH YOUR HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISON TO BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR DISTRICT'S CAPACITY NEEDS

- ☐ **Review the liaison's responsibilities:** Homeless education liaisons have [federally-mandated responsibilities](#), including the identification of students experiencing homelessness. They are your in-house experts and should be consulted about any decision regarding relief funds, especially ARP-HCY funds.
- ☐ **Discuss data:** Liaisons should be able to share data about identification, attendance, etc., as well as additional information about the most pressing needs and challenges students are facing.
- ☐ **Increase liaison capacity (if needed):** If you are the homeless liaison, consider adding capacity to your team by designating a specific person, such as a counselor or social worker, to connect with and support children, youth, and families. If your liaison does not have the adequate capacity to identify and meet the needs of students, consider adding capacity through hiring if possible. Partnerships with community-based organizations are also a valuable way to bolster liaison capacity, meet student needs, and work around internal processes that might delay or prevent quickly adding needed capacity.

☐ ACTION #2: ASSESS YOUR EXISTING PLANS FOR USING RELIEF FUNDS TO ENSURE YOU ARE USING RESOURCES STRATEGICALLY

- ☐ **Reflect:** Consider your existing plans to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Where could new ARP-HCY funds help with unmet needs? Consider how well your plan for supporting these students aligns with the [AASA Learning Recovery & Redesign Guiding Principles](#).
- ☐ **Align resources:** If you have new ARP-HCY funds, make sure to use them in concert with other funding sources. In fact, ARP-HCY funds should be the last source districts turn to for supplementing support with services that you are not otherwise able to provide. Districts should consider using this sequence of funds to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness:



☐ ACTION #3: CREATE A PLAN BASED ON SPECIFIC NEEDS OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- ☐ **Check your data:** Districts should use existing data about students experiencing homelessness to inform how ARP-HCY funds are used. Consider conducting a comprehensive needs assessment with your homeless liaison to determine the greatest needs. For example, SchoolHouse Connection and the Rhode Island Department of Education developed a [short version](#) and a [long version](#) of a needs assessment for districts to use. You can use the self-assessment on page four as a starting point.
- ☐ **Gather stakeholder feedback:** Engage community partners, families, and youth to help you identify the most strategic use of available resources. For example, [Minneapolis Public Schools](#) surveyed current and former students and parents experiencing homelessness and learned that transportation and mental health supports are priorities in their context.
- ☐ **Target funding:** Because of the unique barriers they face, students experiencing homelessness require targeted funding, supports, and interventions. Many efforts to address overall student academic success, mental health, afterschool programming, etc., still miss the opportunity to impact students experiencing homelessness. Targeting portions of all relief funding for these students is critical.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Consider the following short self-assessment as a starting point for determining how ARP, ARP-HCY, and other funds can be used to bolster your district's ability to support students experiencing housing instability. Districts can use this data to form plans for prioritizing and using funds.

Indicator of Need	Data/Evidence to Gather and Consider
Homeless Education Liaison Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What FTE percent does your liaison(s) spend on McKinney-Vento duties? • Divide the FTE (expressed as a decimal) by the # of identified McKinney-Vento students in the LEA. Then multiply that number by 2.4. The result is the number of minutes the liaison can spend per student, per week, on average.
Identification of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of identified McKinney-Vento students over the past four school years • # of identified unaccompanied homeless youth over the past four school years • % of the student body identified as homeless • % of students receiving free or reduced meals
Outreach & Reengagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation # and rates for McKinney-Vento students in state assessments over the past four school years • Participation # and rates for unaccompanied homeless youth in state assessments over the past four school years • Participation # and rates for economically disadvantaged students over the past four school years, to provide a comparison point
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance data for McKinney-Vento students over the past four school years • Are brochures, posters or other materials about the McKinney-Vento Act posted in schools and the community? (Yes/No) • In both # and %, has the participation of McKinney-Vento students in assessments dropped more than economically disadvantaged students? • Is the drop greater for unaccompanied youth?
Education Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement data for McKinney-Vento students over the past four school years • Graduation data for McKinney-Vento students over the past four school years • Dropout data for McKinney-Vento students over the past four school years • All of the above for unaccompanied homeless youth • All of the above for economically disadvantaged students, to provide a comparison point.
Participation in Early Childhood Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of McKinney-Vento children participating in any LEA-administered early childhood education program, including early intervention, preschool special education, Head Start/Early Head Start, or preschool/preK • # of McKinney-Vento children participating in early childhood programs not administered by the LEA, to assess future needs of students entering kindergarten. • # of identified McKinney-Vento children under age six living within your LEA boundaries

Appendix: Additional Background Information

There are approximately 1.2 million preK-12 students experiencing homelessness across the U.S., and another 1.3 million young children under the age of six. Homelessness is traumatic for the children and youth who experience it. Students who experience homelessness are more likely to drop out of high school, and they have higher chronic absence rates and lower school graduation rates than students who are poor but have stable homes. Lack of a high school degree or GED is the single greatest risk factor for experiencing homelessness as a young adult, a factor in perpetuating multi-generational cycles of homelessness. Mobility, invisibility, deep poverty, lack of transportation and communication devices create unique barriers to school identification, enrollment, participation, and success—barriers that have been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[The U.S. Department of Education's ARP-HCY page](#) has information about state award amounts, state plans, and frequently asked questions related to fiscal and programmatic issues. Specific questions should be directed to your district's [homeless education liaison](#), and you can find more resources, including how school districts around the country are using their funds, on [SchoolHouse Connection's ARP-HCY Resource page](#).

About SchoolHouse Connection



SchoolHouse Connection is a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth. We believe education is the only permanent solution to homelessness. Our vision is that children and youth experiencing homelessness have full access to quality learning, birth through higher education, so they will never be homeless as adults, and the next generation will never be homeless.

Website: www.schoolhouseconnection.org