

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: SUPPORTING STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



Lessons from School and
District Liaisons on
How to Support Students
Experiencing Homelessness

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Education Leads Home Campaign

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Dear Reader,

America is reckoning with two public health crises. One, the novel coronavirus, is a recent development that has affected millions in the United States. The other—systemic racism—has deep roots that date back to the founding of this nation. Student homelessness sits at the center of both.

It is impossible to untangle student homelessness from racial inequity. Research conducted by Schoolhouse Connection makes this clear, as Black and Hispanic high school students are more likely to experience homelessness than their White peers (SchoolHouse Connection, 2019). These students are less likely to graduate high school, and more likely to experience homelessness as adults. They are also more likely to suffer the health and economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

For many, the pandemic has meant social distancing, canceling plans, and, for students, distance learning. For the more vulnerable and those furthest from economic justice, especially communities of color, the pandemic has been an unprecedented disaster, significantly exacerbating the challenges they already face.

Children and youth experiencing homelessness often have nowhere to ‘shelter in place’ or ‘stay at home.’ These students also disproportionately lack the technology or Wi-Fi accessibility needed for distance learning. A survey conducted by SchoolHouse Connection during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that mobile hotspots and funds for internet access and devices and technology were among the most pressing needs of students experiencing homelessness in K-12 and postsecondary education (Opportunities for Impact, 2020).

Although the interviews of school district homeless education liaisons and educators conducted for this report occurred in the fall of 2019, before the disruption

and devastation of COVID-19, the practices of robust McKinney-Vento homeless education programs featured here prepared districts and schools to quickly respond to this crises.

As discussed in this report, schools provide stability for over 1.5 million K-12 students experiencing homelessness in the United States. Schools provide not only consistent shelter during the day, but also food (breakfast, lunch, and often weekend bags), clothing, and positive adult relationships. Data shows that high school students who experience homelessness are five times more likely to go hungry than their housed peers (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 2019).

Dedicated staff and innovative programs like the ones featured in this report have helped meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness throughout the pandemic. One such program on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Browning, Montana, has continued to deliver breakfast, lunch, and weekend backpacks from the Montana Food Bank to its students, despite the strain on the community caused by the virus. The school district liaison also works to coordinate food boxes for families and unaccompanied youth who no longer have access to the food pantries located inside shuttered school buildings.

Since the beginning of school closures, another program, MACares in Austin, Texas, has granted over \$4,500 in emergency financial assistance for students and families with outstanding rent and housing fees. This program has also assisted families by donating local grocery store gift cards.

The Help the Homeless fund in Roanoke, Virginia has assisted students and families experiencing homelessness by providing grocery store gift cards, hotel rooms (which the fund did not provide before the pandemic), “pay as you go” phones for unaccompanied

youth, and hot spots for McKinney-Vento students without internet access. Although the number of referrals for assistance with housing and utilities has decreased for now due to the eviction moratorium, the Help the Homeless team is preparing for heightened demand once the moratorium is lifted. The staff is also working to ensure Roanoke students have all the necessary resources to complete school assignments during school closures.

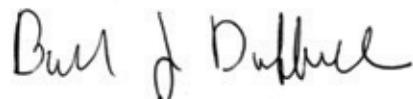
In Texas, Education Service for Students in Transition of Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD) was classified as essential. This allowed the office to open for curbside assistance starting March 23, after a two-week closure to devise a plan for their students experiencing homelessness. Through phone, email, and text, the office is continuing to provide social services and respond to basic needs requests for every family identified as homeless. Families are able to pick up their requested items, including two weeks of groceries, at the school during specific, scheduled times, and the liaison personally delivers goods to unaccompanied youth who lack transportation. So far, Corpus Christi ISD has served over 200 students this way. Other continued services from CCISD include:

- Free lunch for district students in need via curbside pick-up, Mondays through Fridays, with the help of Community in Schools staff;
- Purchasing caps and gowns for all graduating homeless and foster care students;
- Tutoring at homeless shelters via conference lines for those who do not have access to the internet or a computer;
- Altering the summer learning enrichment K-6 program, which serves over 150 students experiencing homelessness, to become the Virtual Summer Learning Program for seven weeks (the program is currently problem-solving to get laptops to the students); and
- Participating in regular district and school staff meetings to discuss new ways of teaching students from home and sharing information about available community resources.

These are just a few examples of the work being done across the country to ensure students experiencing homelessness have the support they need not only to survive the crises, but also to stay engaged in their education. These programs will become even more essential as schools resume educational programs in the fall, as well as in the event of future crises or outbreaks of the coronavirus.

COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the heroism of medical workers, as well as frontline delivery workers, and restaurant and grocery store staff. But we must not forget the critical role of educators, especially the McKinney-Vento homeless education liaisons who continue to support students experiencing homelessness throughout the country. Thank you, district and school liaisons, educators, and staff for your tireless efforts to help students experiencing homelessness every day, and especially during this unprecedented time. Your programs and initiatives are indispensable to ensuring all students receive a quality education with equity. We applaud the work you continue to do for your students and your communities during the pandemic, and we know that your work will inspire others to build or strengthen their own efforts to help students experiencing homelessness survive and thrive.

Sincerely,



Barbara Duffield
Executive Director, SchoolHouse Connection

To learn more about how COVID-19 has impacted children and youth experiencing homelessness, and how policymakers and educators can support these students, visit SchoolHouse Connection's resource page: *COVID-19 and Homelessness: Strategies for Schools, Early Learning Programs, and Higher Education Institutions* (<https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/covid19-and-homelessness/>).

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OUR CHARGE

America is ramping up efforts to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. In addition to increased awareness of the problem, groundbreaking legislation and policies at all levels, public and private support organizations, local communities, and states are undertaking a variety of efforts to boost outcomes for some of the country's most vulnerable children and youth. Examples around the country can inspire other schools, districts, communities, and states to identify, engage, and support students experiencing homelessness in America's schools. Unlike the trauma a young person experiencing homeless is exposed to, school can be a pillar of stability that puts students on a path to graduation and further education to successfully enter the workforce and civic life.

To learn more about a variety of efforts that identify and support students experiencing homelessness in schools and districts throughout the country, Civic conducted interviews with educators in Virginia, New Hampshire, Texas, Montana, and Michigan. The goal of this project is to identify strategies schools and districts are using to

successfully mitigate the challenges these students face attending and succeeding in school and disseminate those best practices.

This work supplements multiple efforts of Building Changes, a Washington State-based nonprofit, aimed at identifying replicable practices for schools on how best to meet the needs of their students experiencing homelessness. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, Building Changes has developed a menu of strategies schools can utilize to support these students. The case studies below further illuminate some of these practices and provide examples other schools and districts can draw upon to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

What follows are examples of the tireless efforts of those throughout the country to ensure educational equity for students experiencing homelessness. It is our hope that these examples will be used to spark innovation, reform, policies, and student supports that will improve outcomes across the nation.



Success stories throughout the nation show that with the right support, students experiencing homelessness can graduate from high school at the same rates as their peers.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Over 1.5 million K-12 students were identified as experiencing homelessness in U.S. public schools during the 2017-18 school year. This is in addition to 1.2 million children under six-years-old who experienced homelessness in public early childhood programs in the same school year. Both of these numbers mark sizable increases over the past decade. Part of the reason for the increase may be due to schools and districts doing a better job at identifying students experiencing homelessness. Other factors, however, such as lack of affordable housing, persistent poverty, the opioid crisis, and increasing natural disasters contribute to this as well.

The data show that the challenges these students face go above and beyond conventional poverty. Students experiencing homelessness are disproportionately exposed to a host of risk-factors that make succeeding in school even more difficult.¹ Students who experience

homelessness are more likely than their non-homeless peers to be held back from grade to grade, have poor attendance or be chronically absent from school, fail courses, have more disciplinary issues, and drop out of school. These negative effects are amplified the longer a student remains homeless.²

Emerging educational data further confirms this: In 2020, the National Center for Education Statistics released the graduation rates of students experiencing homelessness in 49 states that showed these students continue to graduate at rates far below students experiencing traditional poverty.³ In fact, students experiencing homelessness appear to have one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the nation, lower than low-income students, English Language Learners, and students of color.⁴ The unique challenges of students experiencing homelessness also manifest themselves in

¹ Schoolhouse Connection, Student homelessness: Lessons from the youth risk behavior survey (YRBS), Schoolhouse Connection, 2019.

² Ingram, E. S., Bridgeland, J. M., Reed, B., Atwell, M., Hidden in plain sight: Homeless students in America's public schools, Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates, 2016.

³ EDFACTS Data Group 695, School year 2017-18; As of September 23, 2019, for all states except Utah; Utah data were submitted last and as from November 7, 2019.

⁴ Atwell, M., Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., & Ingram, E., Building A Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Raising High School Graduation Rates Annual Update 2019, Civic & Everyone Graduates Center, 2019.



achievement gaps in language arts, math, and science proficiency exams.⁵

These academic gaps are troubling, as young adults with less than a GED or high school diploma are 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness, perpetuating a cycle of intergenerational poverty and homelessness.⁶ Yet, research makes it clear that education is the surest way to break these very same cycles. Not only is a high school diploma linked to a number of positive economic, health, and civic indicators, but more than 95 percent of jobs created during the economic recovery following the 2009 financial crisis have gone to workers with at least some college education.⁷ Most future jobs will not only require a high school diploma, but some level of postsecondary education and training.

While significant, the challenges these students face are not insurmountable. Districts, schools, and educators face challenges in ensuring their students experiencing homelessness are not only able to regularly attend school, but engage in their lessons and have all the same opportunities school offers to their peers. With limited resources and capacity, educators throughout the country are getting creative about how to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness with limited resources and capacity.

Success stories throughout the nation show that with the right support, students experiencing homelessness can graduate from high school at the same rates as their peers. These stories validate the aspirations of those on the front lines of supporting such students: 88 percent of homeless student liaisons interviewed say they are optimistic regarding the potential of youth they work with to graduate from high school college- and career-ready.⁸

⁵ National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), Federal data summary school years 2015–16 through 2017–18: Education for homeless children and youth, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2020.

⁶ Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel S., & Carreon, E., *Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America*, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2019.

⁷ Carnevale, A. P., Jayasundera, T., Gulish, A., *America's divided recovery: College haves and have-nots*, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2016.

⁸ Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates, 2016.



OVERVIEW: BUILDING CHANGES' MENU OF STRATEGIES

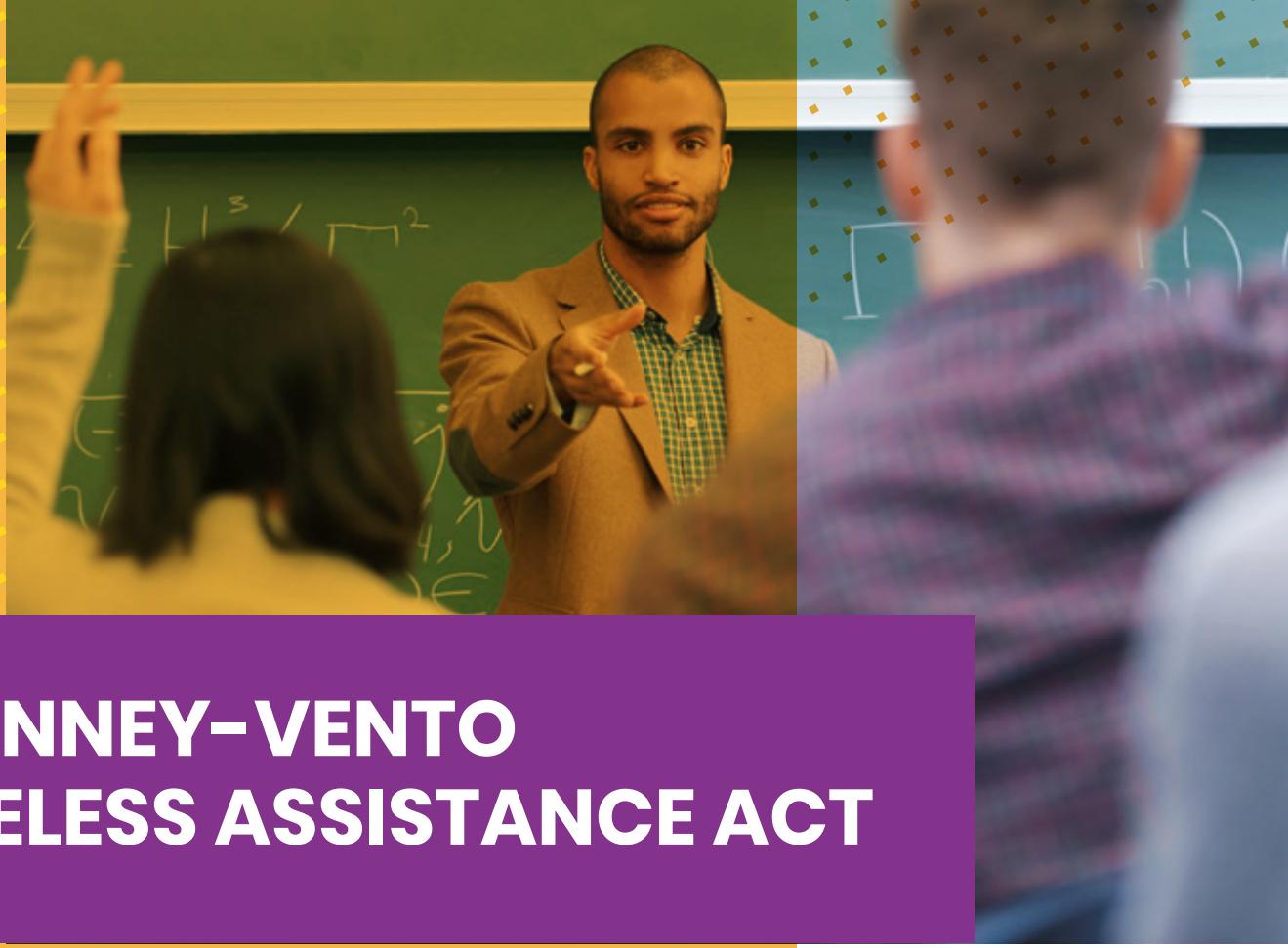
Schoolhouse Washington, a project of Building Changes in Seattle, Washington and an ally of the Education Leads Home campaign, released a working collection of research-based practices to help schools and districts support students and families experiencing homelessness. The [Menu of Strategies](#) covers similar topics to this paper such as basic needs, family outreach and communication, staffing, training,

and housing partnerships. The menu was developed using data analysis of student outcomes in Washington schools and districts, and interviews with professionals, school and district staff, and students and families of color experiencing homelessness in Washington State.

A Building Changes 2019 analysis of K-12 student data showed that only 56 percent of students experiencing homelessness graduated on time in the state of Washington. The Menu of Strategies is one resource to help reach a 90 percent graduation rate by 2027, a Schoolhouse Promise campaign goal, and provide guidance on ways schools can best serve students and families experiencing homelessness.

Strategies for Success serves as an illustrative supplement to the Menu of Strategies by providing case studies on ways schools and districts across the country are implementing some of the strategies identified and recommended by Schoolhouse Washington to support students and families experiencing homelessness. Taken together, we hope that these publications act as a guide for educators at all levels to support students experiencing homelessness in both practical and innovative ways.

Strategies for Success serves as an illustrative supplement to the Menu of Strategies by providing case studies on ways schools and districts across the country are implementing some of the strategies identified and recommended by Schoolhouse Washington to support students and families experiencing homelessness.



MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) is a federal law that provides funding, legal protections, and support to youth and children experiencing homelessness. It was reauthorized, along with other provisions, by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. The education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act defines homelessness as the lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This definition specifically includes children and youth who are: sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in shelters, transitional housing, or cars; or staying in motels or campgrounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations.

The Act, as amended, requires each Local Education Agency (LEA) to designate a liaison for students experiencing homelessness. The act also requires each State Education Agency (SEA) to designate an Office of State Coordinator that can update local liaisons, respond to inquiries from homeless parents and unaccompanied youth, and provide professional development programs for liaisons.

Other provisions of the Act ensure school stability for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Homeless children and youth have the right to remain in their school of origin for the duration of their homelessness and until the end of an academic year in which they obtain permanent housing. LEAs must make best interest determinations about school selection that presume that staying in the school of origin is in the best interest of the child or youth; consider specific student-centered factors; prioritize the wishes of the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth; and include a written explanation and right to appeal if the LEA determines that school stability is not in the best interest of the child or youth.

McKinney-Vento also ensures school enrollment and full participation in school activities. Homeless children and youth must be enrolled in school immediately, even if they lack documents or have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. The law charges SEAs and LEAs with developing, reviewing, and revising policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of homeless students in school, including barriers due to fees, fines, and absences. Lastly, states must have procedures to identify and remove

barriers that prevent students from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with state, local, and school policies. State plans must describe how homeless youth will receive assistance from school counselors to advise, prepare, and improve their readiness for college.⁹

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) is a federal law that provides funding, legal protections, and support to youth and children experiencing homelessness.

In addition, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) bolstered the McKinney-Vento Act to ensure students experiencing homelessness are afforded the same educational opportunities as their stably-housed peers. In particular, the law requires that all LEAs that receive Title I Part A funds must set aside funding to support students experiencing homelessness. These reserved funds may be used for services not typically covered under Title I. ESSA also expanded data reporting requirements, mandating that states include disaggregated data on graduation rates and academic achievement of students experiencing homelessness.¹⁰

The McKinney-Vento Act, including the recent ESSA amendments, provides the strongest blueprint for success by ensuring that students experiencing homelessness have the supports needed to succeed in school. Many of the examples that follow demonstrate what can be achieved when districts implement the law robustly or, in some cases, go above and beyond the letter of the law to embrace the spirit of the law. It is important that districts and schools across the nation take these bright spots of comprehensive and vigorous McKinney-Vento implementation to heart to ensure their students receive the full rights and opportunities afforded to them under law.



⁹ American Bar Association and SchoolHouse Connection, Educating Students Experiencing Homelessness, 2018.

¹⁰ Schoolhouse Connection, 2019.



BRIGHT SPOTS

Additional Academic Supports

Students experiencing homelessness are faced with significant barriers to graduate high school. These challenges are apparent in the graduation rates released by the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) that show states with graduation rates as low as 47 percent.¹¹ Research also shows that failing to complete high school is the single greatest risk factor for experiencing homelessness as a young person, making high school graduation an essential step in ending cycles of poverty and homelessness.¹² One of the main reasons students cited for dropping out of high school was that they fell behind academically and could not catch up, or they did not see a connection between what they were learning in the classroom and what they wanted to do in life.¹³ For these reasons, making sure students experiencing homelessness have access to additional academic instruction that is relevant to their dreams and career aspirations is critical.

Traverse City Area Public Schools (MI) is implementing a compelling effort called Students in Transition Empowerment Program (STEP) that has an impact on students experiencing homelessness.

STEP is a program administered by Traverse City Area Public Schools that provides free, supportive, education-related services to students, ages 3-20, who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing. The goals of the program are to ensure school stability, remove barriers so students experiencing homelessness can fully participate in their education, and support academic achievement while students are in residential transition, have lost their housing, or are homeless. Any McKinney-Vento eligible student who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate overnight residence (at any time during the school year) is eligible to receive STEP services for the remainder of that school year.

The program is solely funded through grants and community donations. The district's Title I, Part A set-aside under the Every Student Succeeds Act has allowed the

¹¹ National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), Federal data summary school years 2015-16 through 2017-18: Education for homeless children and youth, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2020.

¹² Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2019.

¹³ Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., and Morison, K., The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts. Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates, 2006.

district to hire staff members in three high schools that not only identify and assess each student referred, but work intentionally with students experiencing unstable housing to provide academic support and tutoring, as well as non-academic support, like ensuring their basic needs are met.

In addition to STEP staff members, the STEP program offers a wide range of services to support students who are experiencing homelessness. This includes

- Providing school supplies;
- Helping students secure transportation to and from school via school bus, public transit, or gas cards;
- Free school breakfast in addition to the federal free and reduced-priced lunch program;
- Pre- and post-school program assistance;
- College admissions support, including registration guidance, FAFSA completion, and information on scholarships;
- Clothing for school purposes, personal hygiene products, and winter clothing;
- General funds for extracurricular activities or interests; and
- Referrals for housing, mental health, counseling, medical, transitional living, resources, job training, work programs, and post-secondary education counseling.

There is also support offered to the entire family, through early childhood referrals, sleeping materials such as a sleeping bag, sports passes, transportation to and from school activities, and housing assistance coordinated with other community resources.

This comprehensive approach has an impact. The STEP program serves an average of over 500 students each school year. During the 2018–2019 school year, STEP identified and served 540 students, ages birth to 20. One recent graduate said, “Every day I think about where I would be if I didn’t meet Andrea and STEP, and receive all the help that I did. I am incredibly thankful for everything she has done for me...Because of her and the STEP program, I learned many great lessons about hard work and perseverance, graduated on time and successfully began my first semester of college.”

Basic Needs Support

For students experiencing homelessness, getting basic needs like clothing and personal hygiene products, let alone

school supplies, is a struggle. Although many students do not give a second thought to these needs, they can be the difference between attending school and dropping out for a youth in transition. The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to meet the basic need of food through school meal programs such as free and reduced lunch, but many districts interviewed go above and beyond the spirit of the law to ensure students’ basic needs are being met.

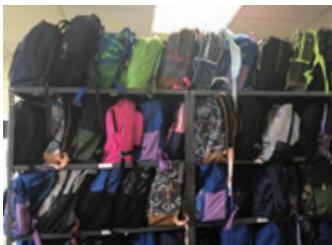
Research shows it is immeasurably more difficult to attend and focus in school if a student is thinking about where they will sleep that evening or if they will be able to eat dinner. Students who experience homelessness are more likely to be held back from grade to grade, to have poor attendance or be chronically absent from school, fail courses, have more disciplinary issues, and drop out of school before getting their high school diploma than their non-homeless peers.¹⁴

Districts across the country have found creative solutions to meet the basic needs of their students experiencing homelessness. General strategies that schools and districts have applied include: resource hubs on school campuses, school food pantries, and backpack buddy programs that send students home with food on weekends or holidays. The following districts have also created solutions to meet the basic needs of their students experiencing homelessness.

Clear Creek Independent School District

Clear Creek Independent School District (CCISD) in Texas performs a one-on-one basic needs assessment with all of their at-risk students, including those identified as experiencing homelessness at the beginning of the year, to understand the needs of their students. Clear Creek ISD has over 17,000 at-risk students. They complete the basic needs assessments with some of those at-risk students and all of the ones experiencing homelessness (part of the at-risk category), which is usually about 1,300 students. The one-on-one meeting with students experiencing homelessness allows teachers, counselors, and social workers to build relationships with the most vulnerable students.

The district also has a nonprofit foundation, CCISD Cares, which was formed to help provide basic needs support to families in the district. Every campus has a counselor that students or families in need of basic needs support can contact. The counselor then does their best to connect the family with the needed support. If the counselor cannot meet the needs of the family, they can refer them to the district social workers who can help to remove additional barriers to student success.



Corpus Christi ISD Donation Room; Photo courtesy of CCISD

Corpus Christi Independent School District

The Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD) in Texas has a donation room in one of their administrative offices that spans an entire classroom. The room has anything students may need—pants, shirts, socks, and undergarments. It serves over 500 homeless unaccompanied youth, students whose families cannot afford basic needs, and even students who are wearing improper clothing for the school day. There's a wide variety of donors including nurses, teachers, and even neighboring school districts. Additionally, homeless students are provided with basic supports such as backpacks, school supplies, toiletries, and bus passes.

The donation room also has a food pantry program that serves as an incentive to increase attendance for homeless students. Students do not have to worry where their next meal is coming from, and avoid the pain of hunger that causes a lack of participation in school. The program provides homeless students nutritious meals and snacks to take home for the weekends and holidays when they have no access to the National School Lunch Program. For CCISD, it is about removing barriers for students. If a student is not attending school because of basic needs, the school makes sure they have them.

Deer Park Independent School District

Deer Park Independent School District in Texas partners with a number of organizations to ensure students' basic needs are met. **Deer Park Opportunity Center** (DPOC) was formed by the local Rotary Club in Texas 12 years ago in response to the growing number of transitional students and families in Deer Park Independent School District, with the goal of helping families and students experiencing homelessness in the district. As a nonprofit organization, all donations to the Center go directly to students and families in need.

Community members, school district employees, churches, or families reach out to the DPOC board members via email or phone with potential students who may need assistance. The contacted board member then relays the information to the rest of the board for a vote. Vetting is done to ensure that the need is “a hand up not a hand out,” meaning the family is not habitually in need because the funds are

limited. If DPOC cannot address the need, they reach out to local businesses, community members, or churches to either augment their donation or provide the funding for that particular need. Over the years, this economic support has been able to assist families with paying bills, buying food, and even purchasing specific items like a mattress.

To provide clothing to students in need, Deer Park partners with both the Assistance League of the Bay Area and Clothed by Faith. The Assistance League's Operation School Bell provides new clothing, uniforms, jackets, belts, shoes, socks, underwear, and personal hygiene kits to students in Deer Park ISD and other districts in the Galveston Bay Area. Through Operation School Bell, the Assistance League allows selected students in Deer Park ISD to have a shopping day at Kohl's, a department store local to Deer Park. Clothed by Faith is a faith-based organization that provides gently-used clothing to those in-need throughout the area. The clothes they give away are supplied by donations from the community, while other personal items are newly purchased. To date, Clothed by Faith has supported over 58,000 people in the Greater Houston Area.

Finally, to ensure students are adequately fed and nourished, Deer Park partners with the local food bank and food pantry. The food pantry services the whole area and allows families the school district has identified as in-need to shop as frequently as required. Meanwhile, the local food bank runs a Backpack Buddy program. Through this program, food insecure families are given backpacks every Friday with child-friendly, non-perishable food that will last through the weekend. This is pivotal for many students experiencing homelessness, as they rely on free and reduced-price lunch and breakfast programs throughout the school week, but lack similar programs on weekends.

McCallum High School

At McCallum High School in Austin, Texas, the Parent-Teacher Association created a subdivision called **MACares**, which provides support through McCallum's Licensed Mental Health Professionals (LMHP) and counselors to the students they serve. The program was created when a student attending school while living in a shelter had trouble making it back to their shelter in time for dinner. McCallum's school mental health professional requested food gift cards so that the student could eat dinner at the local McDonald's before returning to the shelter. After submitting the request, the school staff member was overwhelmed by the support that poured in, saying “we had a community who wants to seize a problem.” It was that desire that led to the creation of MACares seven years ago.

Today, MACares also supports the 10 elementary and 2 middle schools that feed into McCallum High School.

Students of Color Experiencing Homelessness: Analysis and Recommendations by Building Changes' Schoolhouse Washington Project

Research has documented that students of color are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness. Data from Building Changes shows that 62 percent of students experiencing homelessness are students of color, despite making up just 46 percent of all K-12 public school students in the state.¹⁵ Students experiencing homelessness also have lower proficiency rates in both English language arts and mathematics. This is especially true for students of color, including American Indian and Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic and Latino, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander students that have the lowest proficiency rates in both subjects.¹⁶

To learn more about these students' unique experiences, Schoolhouse Washington interviewed more than 30 students and families of color in King County, Washington about their experiences with homelessness. Major takeaways from these interviews include:¹⁷

- Students and families of color experience racism in both schools and shelters. Both parents and youth say they would feel more comfortable if there were more people of color working in schools and shelters.
- More teachers and staff need to be trained on recognizing early warning signs of students experiencing homelessness.
- Students, families, and staff in shelters and schools need more education on all McKinney-Vento rights, including on the rights and experiences of doubled-up students.

With the qualitative data from these interviews, Schoolhouse Washington worked with school liaisons, staff, community providers, and parents and youth to develop strategies and solutions to address the issues raised in interviews. Examples of intentional strategies school and district could use to close equity gaps for their students experiencing homelessness include:¹⁸

- Establishing partnerships with culturally specific organizations to provide tailored support.
- Explicitly including equity in district and school planning processes, such as strategic and improvement plans.
- Providing training for and implementing equitable education practices, such as culturally responsive teaching.
- Frequent review of disaggregated data in order to identify disparities.

It is impossible to close long-standing academic achievement and graduation gaps between students of color and their white peers without an intentional focus on improving outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. These gaps are rooted in this country's long-standing history of systematic disenfranchisement and oppression of these students and their families. As such, ensuring that students experiencing homelessness receive the necessary supports to succeed in school and graduate ready for college or career is an equity mandate that is required for America to finally live up to its promise of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race.

¹⁵ Lemon, M., *Students Experiencing Homelessness in Washington's K-12 Public Schools: 2015-2018 Trends, Characteristics, and Academic Outcomes*, Schoolhouse Washington, a project of Building Changes: Seattle, WA, 2019. https://www.schoolhousewa.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolhouseWA_OutcomesReport_2019.pdf.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 37 & 43.

¹⁷ Interviews and data reveal lack of support for students and families of color experiencing homelessness, Schoolhouse Washington, a project of Building Changes: Seattle, WA, December 5, 2019. <https://schoolhousewa.org/ideas/lack-of-support-for-students-and-families-of-color-experiencing-homelessness/>.

¹⁸ For more information and a complete list of strategies, see Lemon, M., *Beating the Odd: How Can Schools and Districts Support Students Experiencing Homelessness?* Seattle, WA: Schoolhouse Washington, a project of Building Changes, 2020. https://schoolhousewa.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolhouseWA_BeatingtheOdds_2020.pdf.

The program provides students and families assistance through gift cards to local grocery stores, mental health supports, holiday assistance, and even dorm room shopping for graduating seniors in need. MACares also ensures there are always snacks available for students throughout the school day to ensure students who may not be able to find a meal at home are well nourished.

In addition, MACares provides emergency financial support to families or unaccompanied youth. While this is available to all students in the McCallum High School vertical team, school staff noted that most of the emergency financial support is used to support students or families experiencing housing instability. Below are some examples of what the emergency financial support has covered.

- Two weeks of hotel expenses for a McCallum senior and mother, who was undergoing treatment for cancer. In partnership with MACares, St. John's United Methodist Church assumed responsibility for supporting this family by providing temporary housing, transportation to medical appointments, food, and assistance with finding stable housing.
- When both of a student's parents were hospitalized and the family's only car was in jeopardy of being repossessed, MACares covered the delinquent car loan.
- After the primary wage earner of a family was deported, MACares covered the utility bills for the family who had four students in the McCallum High School system.
- When two siblings from McCallum High School were experiencing homelessness, MACares provided the initial rent expense for the siblings to move into an apartment with family members.

MACares is sustained through community donations as well as an annual fundraiser with the local chapter of Ten Thousand Villages.

Spotsylvania County Public Schools

Spotsylvania County Public Schools in Virginia opened **Treasure House** about 10 years ago in the high school with the highest needs and largest population of McKinney-Vento students. Treasure House allows McKinney-Vento identified and low-income families to "shop" once a month for free. It exists entirely through community donated support and has everything from food and clothing to laundry detergent and toilet paper. A large portion of contributions comes from the annual 'Rock Out Knock Out Homelessness' event with Spotsylvania's local Walmart, in which members of the community, including school board members and superintendents, stand outside of the store passing out fliers asking for donations as people walk in. The event is well-publicized on the radio, in newspapers, and through social media. A box truck is filled for Treasure House each year.

Treasure House meets the basic needs of families and students, while maintaining dignity and creating a sense of community. Both students and families feel empowered to be able to pick out anything they need, and it opens the door for them to feel comfortable sharing concerns and barriers they are experiencing with the school. Treasure House forms a community among its shoppers. While shopping, parents often point out products that were on others' lists for them and bring back previously collected clothes as their children grow out of them. As explained by a Spotsylvania school social worker, "Treasure House is a place where no one is getting judged. I tell folks all the time this is not a hand out, it's a hand up."



District Nonprofits

Schools always want to do what they can to help their students, but oftentimes, financial resources and capacity are limited. To address these constraints and maximize community support, some districts have formed nonprofit organizations to assist their families and students experiencing homelessness in a variety of ways.

The Foundation for Fairfax County Public Schools: Fairfax, VA

To maximize support for vulnerable students, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) in Virginia established **The Foundation for Fairfax County Public Schools**. In 2015, the Foundation created the “Kids in Need” fund to generate community donations to help the 55,000 students who are low income throughout the district, with a particular focus on students experiencing homelessness. The ‘Kids in Need’ fund pays lunch debts and provides school supplies, backpacks, gift cards for emergency needs, personal hygiene items, and laptops to many of the 29 percent of the FCPS student population who are low income. Each year, the “Collect for Kids” school supply drive coordinates with non-profits, faith-based and civic organizations, and local businesses to provide school supplies for these needy students.

The Foundation also offers grants for teachers to support programs in their schools each year. In 2019, 45 teachers were selected for grants that totaled over \$90,000. One such program organizes students with disabilities to work in the food pantry. Fairfax County has ensured that it is convenient for the community to donate. Creative donation options include text-to-give campaigns, corporate matching programs, and Virginia tax refunds. The Foundation is even listed as a charity option through AmazonSmile, a program that donates 0.5 percent of eligible purchases on Amazon to a charity of the buyer’s choosing. A foundation makes it simple for homeless liaisons to quickly use donated money on a student in need as crises arise—no paperwork, no red tape. As an official in FCPS’ district office put it, “I can get a call at nine o’clock that we have a student sleeping on the floor and by 11 o’clock we can have an air mattress to go home with the kid that day.”

Kalispell HEART Program: Kalispell, MT

In Montana, the Homeless Education Liaison of Kalispell Schools founded their own nonprofit, the Kalispell Homeless Education And Resources Together (**HEART**) Program, to meet the basic needs of their students experiencing homelessness. The organization is run by their District Liaison, and helps students in Kalispell Public Schools (District #5) and Evergreen School District #50. The nonprofit is the

umbrella organization for four programs: HEART Locker, Locker Learning Center, HEART Markets, and HEART Fund.

HEART Locker is a high-end, second-hand clothing store free to all students who need it, with the slogan: “take what you need and use what you take.” High school students can volunteer to work in the HEART Locker. There are smaller versions of the HEART Locker within HEART Markets on three high school campuses for students who do not have transportation to the main office downtown. HEART Markets are a partnership with the Flathead Food Bank to provide food for students in need, as well as things like school supplies and personal hygiene products. The HEART Fund is comprised of donations from small businesses and community members that are used for families in distress on necessities like gas cards and rental payment assistance. Recently, the HEART Program opened HEART Locker Learning Center, a teen drop-in center open three nights a week.

Many schools in rural and/or impoverished districts do not have access to the same level of community support and resources larger towns and cities have. The Kalispell HEART Program has received enough donations from the community that they are able to share resources with nearby school districts who need the extra support.

The Education Project: Ypsilanti, MI

In Michigan, **The Education Project for Homeless Youth** is a partnership with Washtenaw County and the Ozone House, an organization that provides services for homeless and at-risk teens. The project receives McKinney-Vento funding, as well as additional state grants and donations from the community. It is housed in the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, but serves children and youth aged 0-21 from the 9 school districts and 13 public school academies in the county, including Ypsilanti Community Schools, who are McKinney-Vento eligible. In addition to providing basic needs and support, The Education Project pays school related expenses such as field trips, sports teams, and tutoring for youth experiencing homelessness.

The Education Project has helped make connecting students to resources simple through the Student Referral Form that includes the student’s basic information; a needs assessment for backpacks, underwear, coats, toiletries, academic support, activity fees, and enrollment assistance; and a transportation assessment for bus tokens, gas cards, and long term transportation information. In Ypsilanti schools, the general education social worker, who is the McKinney-Vento point of contact, helps the student fill out the referral form and completes the Temporary Residence Statement with them. The Education Project then works to connect the student to the support they need to enroll, regularly attend, and succeed in school.

School Discipline

Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to be suspended from school than their housed peers.^{19,20} Despite McKinney-Vento support, students experiencing homelessness also struggle with chronic absenteeism at higher rates than even their low-income, housed peers for reasons such as having more experiences with trauma, lack of transportation, less access to medical care, inconsistent night-time residencies, and a parent prioritizing basic needs over school. Students who drop out of school typically experience a slow process of disengagement as early as late elementary or middle school, with absenteeism being an early warning indicator.^{21,22}

Traditionally, school discipline policy and practice, including for missing school or arriving late, has been punitive disciplinary action, including detention, suspension, or even expulsion after repeat offenses. Yet, school discipline policies of this type only serve to further disconnect students from their education and send the signal that they do not belong there.

Rather than erecting even more barriers for students to be in school and engaged in their classes, schools and districts are implementing positive school discipline policies and practices for children and youth that get them to accept responsibility for their actions, while recognizing their unique circumstances to meet students where they are and respond to the context of each situation. Such efforts draw on the student's capacities to work together with educators to re-engage those students productively in school.

Despite McKinney-Vento support, students experiencing homelessness also struggle with chronic absenteeism at higher rates than even their low-income, housed peers for reasons such as having more experiences with trauma, lack of transportation, less access to medical care, inconsistent night-time residencies, and a parent prioritizing basic needs over school.

McKinney-Vento requires that LEAs review and revise barriers to identification, enrollment, and retention, including any attendance and discipline policies that negatively impact students experiencing homelessness. Typically if a student misses a specific number of days of school, for example, they are required to repeat a grade. In one school district, if the school knows or believes a student to be McKinney-Vento eligible, they will check-in with the district liaison and use their input in discipline determinations.

Richmond, Virginia has the Parents + Attendance = Students Success (PASS) docket, a new Richmond Public School (RPS) and Richmond Juvenile Court initiative that aims to lower chronic absenteeism across the division by connecting students and families with wrap-around supports while enforcing school attendance through the legal system.

In the past, parents and guardians of chronically absent students were petitioned to attend a formal court hearing when students were habitually absent from school. This traditional method of court hearings did not have a track record of improving outcomes for students, as many families were still impacted by the unaddressed social issues that hindered their child's attendance and academic progress. The PASS docket addresses those social issues by providing direct and real-time access to support through a trauma-informed framework.

While the hearings are still a required part of the proceedings, they now take place outside of the courtroom setting and in a RPS school, making the process more comfortable and accessible for families. Oftentimes, a judge will require a family to make an appointment to see representatives from social services or the mental health department as a part of their court order. Now, they do not have to wait to access those resources. The initiative provides immediate, community-based support and a comprehensive plan of services for them as soon as they exit their hearing.

In addition, RPS partnered with community organizations that are present during the monthly PASS dockets and can provide resources and support for families immediately following their hearing. Housing and health were issues that often came up in court hearings, so the PASS docket includes the McKinney-Vento Team as well as legal aid services that support families going through an eviction. A few other partner agencies of PASS include RPS School Social Work, Communities in Schools, Richmond Sheriff's Department, and the Trauma Informed Community Network.

¹⁹ Schoolhouse Washington, Students experiencing homelessness in Washington's K-12 public schools: Trends, characteristics and academic outcomes 2016-17, Schoolhouse Washington, 2018.

²⁰ Ray, A., Gallo, M., Green, P., Velarde, S., Ibarra, B., Airgood-Obrycki, W., & Garshick Kleit, R., Homelessness and education in Florida: Impacts on children and youth, Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, University of Florida and Miami Homes for All, 2017.

²¹ Civic Enterprises, 2006.

²² Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates, 2016.

In Michigan, the Losco Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) took another approach, putting a checkbox on their truancy referral form that asked if a student is potentially experiencing homelessness. If that student was then identified as homeless, they approached the case differently than for a student who may be simply skipping school. The policy change permitted officials to understand the context for the absenteeism and to address the underlying conditions that were causing such disengagement from school.

Similarly, Corpus Christi Independent School District in Texas adjusted how they discipline students experiencing homelessness. Whenever an educator enters a name into their discipline system, that student's homeless status is listed on the page and highlighted. If the educator then documents a removal in the form of an out-of-school suspension, a confirmation dialogue box pops up with the following message: "HB 360 prohibits a district from placing a homeless student in out-of-school suspension except in the case of conduct including weapons, violence, drugs/alcohol on school property or during a school-related event." In addition, the district case manager for students in transition has full access to the district discipline system, which allows for the review of disciplinary actions against students experiencing homelessness and requires schools to contact the district homeless office any time they plan on giving a student an out-of-school suspension. Such a careful process ensures cooperation among officials working to keep students experiencing homelessness on track.

Credit Recovery

Students with unstable housing often face myriad challenges in attending school regularly, including the need to work to support themselves or their families. The need to get a job was a significant reason cited for leaving high school by students who dropped out of high school.²³ In addition, the lack of stable housing may cause these students to live in multiple locations throughout the school year, which can cause disruptions in their transportation to and from school, and even potentially push students to transfer schools despite their right to remain in their school of origin under the McKinney-Vento Act. All these factors combine to make it difficult for students to accumulate enough credits to get through high school.

For these reasons, it is important for students experiencing homelessness to have a variety of pathways for accruing enough credits to graduate from high school. The Every Student Succeeds Act added provisions to the McKinney-Vento Act requiring states to have procedures to identify and remove barriers to students experiencing homelessness receiving credit for partial coursework

HiSET Exam

The HiSET Exam is an alternative to a high school diploma and gives out-of-school youth and adults the best opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Students move at their own pace and can study using HiSET Academy Online Learning Program (<https://hiset.ets.org>).

they complete, even when they are moving from school to school. Since ESSA's passage, many states have passed laws or regulations on partial credits for students experiencing homelessness.

While more needs to be learned about the overall effectiveness of credit recovery and alternative programs, these programs have great utility for students experiencing homelessness who struggle with the rigidity of a typical school schedule and setting. Several districts and schools we spoke with have credit recovery or alternative programs at their schools that liaisons say greatly benefited their population of students experiencing homelessness.

While more needs to be learned about the overall effectiveness of credit recovery and alternative programs, these programs have great utility for students experiencing homelessness who struggle with the rigidity of a typical school schedule and setting.

In districts like Spotsylvania County Public Schools in Virginia and Ypsilanti Community Schools in Michigan, students who are close to graduation are eligible to gain credit through online credit recovery programs. Spotsylvania County seniors are eligible to take up to three courses through the QUEST (Quality Utilization of Educational Standards Team) program after they are referred by their guidance counselor. To be eligible, students also must take two Standards of Learning exams (Virginia's end-of-course exams for certain courses).

As a district staff member in Ypsilanti put it, "We recognize that life is chaotic for these students, so we try to help them get across the threshold." Offering a quality online credit recovery course does exactly that.

Winnacunnet High School

In addition to credit recovery programs, evening school or flex schedules can also make it easier for students experiencing homelessness to get the credits needed to

²³ Civic Enterprises, 2006.

earn their high school diploma. Winnacunnet High School, part of a New Hampshire School Administration Unit, offers an evening school program that has been helpful for mobile students to complete high school and even work full time during the day. Students can either finish coursework to work toward the specific credits needed for a state minimum standard diploma or they can participate in HiSET preparation to be equipped with the targeted skills necessary to successfully pass the HiSET test. Classes are held Tuesday through Thursday from 5:20PM to 8:50PM. Since it is often more difficult to coordinate transportation for students in the evening, the district uses part of its ESSA Title I-A set-aside to pay for contracted transportation for students experiencing homelessness to attend classes in the evening if they have no other means of transportation.

Kalispell School District

Kalispell School District (MT) offers students the opportunity to enroll and attend a robust alternative program based at the Linderman Education Center (LEC). The LEC offers three alternative programs that provide an opportunity for students who are seeking an educational experience in a setting that differs from the structure of a traditional high school with a primary objective of providing students with a safe and caring environment that encourages academic achievement, personal growth, and a sense of civic responsibility. Each student creates their own educational plan based on their individual needs and graduation timeline.

As part of the LEC, the Academic Transition Center is a program designed to serve high school students who have dropped out, are at risk of dropping out, or are not finding success at their current educational setting (based on attendance and academic standing). Students spend seven weeks in the transition program working on two core subjects and a class focused on social and emotional learning, which research has shown boosts many of the educational outcomes schools already measure. The program provides credit recovery for core academics by certified teachers and a continuum of supportive services provided by a counselor.

The alternative programs foster a nurturing environment through smaller class settings that allow students to have more individualized attention. It also offers flexible scheduling through morning, afternoon, and evening offerings, as well as the option for online courses. Kalispell School District provides students who choose an online program with computers if one is not already available to them. All students enrolled in the alternative program also have access to transportation. The program also works with students who must work during the day to support themselves or their families to ensure their schedule works.

There are multiple ways for students to enter into the alternative program. Typically, a student who is behind in credits is identified as in need of an intervention and subsequently enrolled at the Linderman Education Center. Some students volunteer for the alternative program because a normal school schedule is not an option for them, often because they have to work to provide for themselves or their families. These students receive a referral from the McKinney-Vento liaison detailing that their schedule is not conducive to a normal school day.

District staff at Kalispell largely attribute having the highest graduation rate in the state for McKinney-Vento students to the flexibility of their alternative program to work with students on their path to a diploma.

Out of School Supports

School is often the place students are most provided for and supported. When the school day and year end, students find themselves without a stable shelter for much of the day that provided them with a meal, as well as other potential help such as clothing and supportive relationships. For these reasons, schools must do their best to continue supporting students outside of traditional school time.

Understanding that many students experiencing homelessness rely on school lunch and breakfast programs for their meals, a number of districts implemented programs that send food home with students in the evening or over weekends and holidays.

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Browning Public Schools

For example, Browning, Montana is located on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, a food desert where families and students often live doubled-up. To alleviate some of the barriers to education students face, Browning Public Schools has various partnerships with local nonprofits to get students the food they need to focus and succeed in school. The school district partnered with Food Access and Sustainability Team (FAST) Blackfeet to provide emergency food and holiday food baskets to unaccompanied homeless youth. Thanks to a generous grant from Town Pump, there are now four school-based pantries in a

middle, high, and alternative high school, as well as Babb, an even more rural town 40 miles north of Browning. Students get to have a shopping experience centered around self-sufficiency where they are able to pick out the food they want to bring home.

Browning Public Schools also has a partnership with Farm Hands (The Blackfeet Nourish Project) that brings fresh produce every other week to schools to send it home with students in-need on the weekends. They work closely with the Montana Food Bank too, which provides weekend backpack meals for pre-K through 6th grade students.

Deer Park Independent School District

Some schools extend supports into the summer months. Recognizing there was a gap in services from the end of the high school year and beginning of postsecondary programs for graduating seniors, Deer Park Independent School District in Texas decided to extend services to meet the needs of students who continued to have questions over the summer. To do this, the administration funded the Crisis Counselor, who works specifically with students experiencing homelessness, to work an additional 10 days in the summer to facilitate any ongoing conversations or questions students matriculating may have prior to the beginning of the academic year.

Missoula County Public Schools

Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) in Montana has an alternative program at Willard Alternative High School open to all high schoolers, with an enrollment of about 150 students. The alternative program offers nontraditional ways of learning, including access to the HiSET Academy. Willard is also home to a new Teen Drop-in Center, where students have a safe space to do homework, apply for jobs, and relax after school. Through the district's McKinney-Vento grant, MCPS staffs a full-time specialist at the program to help meet the basic needs of students in transition.

In addition to access to clothing and food, the Drop-in Center has a washer, dryer, and shower for students to use. It is open 3:00 to 6:00pm Monday through Thursday so that any student from across the district can access the resources after school four nights a week. Students who attend are given basic supplies and services from community partners such as the Missoula Partnership Health, which provides low to no cost medical services, FASFA night, and resources for accessing postsecondary opportunities. The center is especially helpful for Missoula's high number of unaccompanied youth, who comprised 94 of the 208 students identified as homeless in the 2017-2018 school year.²⁴

New Hampshire School Administrative Unit

In New Hampshire, a medium sized School Administrative Unit in the southern part of the state has after school programs hosted at elementary (approximately 400 students) and middle (approximately 300 students) schools. Students are identified for the programs through a variety of criteria. McKinney-Vento eligible students can automatically enroll at no cost.

The on-site elementary program is Title I funded for 1st through 4th graders three days a week from 2:30 to 4:30pm. Its goal is to create an after school learning community where students feel important, safe, and successful. There are income and academic criteria for participation, but McKinney-Vento eligible students are able to automatically enroll for free. Students are divided into sections by grade level—sometimes into two rooms if there are more students than one classroom can handle. Each section is staffed by a certified teacher and paraprofessional, and the program is coordinated by a literacy teacher. A substantial late lunch/early dinner is served and transportation is provided home for all participating students (this can include out-of-district transportation for McKinney-Vento eligible students).

The on-site middle school program is run and staffed by a local youth service agency for students in 5th through 8th grades from 2:30 to 6:00pm. All students are welcome (and encouraged) to attend. Its objectives are to improve academic performance and develop social skills through literacy activities, service learning, and experiential learning. The first half of the program is for homework or work assistance and the second half is for high interest and exciting activities; a substantial late lunch/dinner is also served at no cost. There is no transportation provided for these students. Sometimes making connections between students and families can lead to transportation, but the homeless liaison may pay for transportation home for a McKinney-Vento student through their district's funds. In 2018, 162 middle school students were enrolled in the program and over 60 percent of those who regularly attended improved their grades in language and math.

Universal Screening and Identification

The McKinney-Vento Act requires SEAs and LEAs to develop and review policies for identifying students experiencing homelessness. For many schools, ensuring all students experiencing homelessness are quickly identified and treated consistently is one of the biggest challenges to getting these students the support they need. We know from research that students experiencing homelessness are often hesitant to self-identify and fear how the stigma

24 Evans, C., New teen drop-in center offers safe after school space for Missoula high schoolers, *Missoulian*, 8 October 2019.

of being homeless will convey to their peers.²⁵ Ensuring cross-district consistency in identification of McKinney-Vento students is key to ensure students are not falling through the cracks. Best practices identified through our interviews included requiring residency questions on school enrollment forms and electronic systems.

Enrollment Forms: Allegan, MI

In Allegan Public Schools (APS) in Michigan, a family's living arrangements are a required question among the other traditional information when enrolling in school. Options to select are: living in a home or renting; living with extended family; currently living with someone other than a parent or legal guardian; and 'other.' This way, the school can immediately determine if a student needs to be identified under McKinney-Vento before they step through the door.

Once identified, the child is fully supported by APS' services. Parents are given a brochure explaining their child's rights under McKinney-Vento and the child is documented in the School Information System. Most notably, the district arranges transportation as needed to ensure the student can remain at their school of origin. If a transportation agreement is required between the school of origin and school of residence, the cost is split in half by the two schools.

Housing Determination App: Loudoun County, VA

After requesting an electronic system for the more than 2,500 Housing Determination forms Loudoun County Public Schools (VA) receive from students and families each year, the local liaison convinced the district to create an electronic database that will roll out this year, which will be accessible through an application accessible on smartphones. Through the database, parents will be able to complete the Housing Determination application on their phone or come to the school to complete it on a library computer instead of going through the school's McKinney-Vento contact to fill it out via paper.

The new system will automatically email parents and/or students who are McKinney-Vento eligible and alert relevant school staff, such as a social worker and counselor. Currently, when reports on students are requested, the data is a week old, but the new system will allow for real-time data. Eventually, Loudoun County will be able to track services provided, view average attendance rates, and pull data that show year to year trends on their students experiencing homelessness.

Social Services Partnership:

Alexandria City, VA

The homeless education liaison in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) in Virginia created a powerful partnership with the city's Department of Community and Human Services to quickly identify students experiencing homelessness. Unlike social services, public schools do not have access to the names of people evicted in the city, leaving schools out of the loop if a family with a student faces housing instability following an eviction. If social services and the school are not in coordination, this puts the onus on the school to identify a student as experiencing homelessness in this situation, delaying their ability to coordinate services for that student. In Alexandria City, the Department agreed to include a question on their intake form for parents to give permission for the Department to share their information with the homeless liaison to coordinate educational services for their children in public schools.

McKinney-Vento Training and Awareness

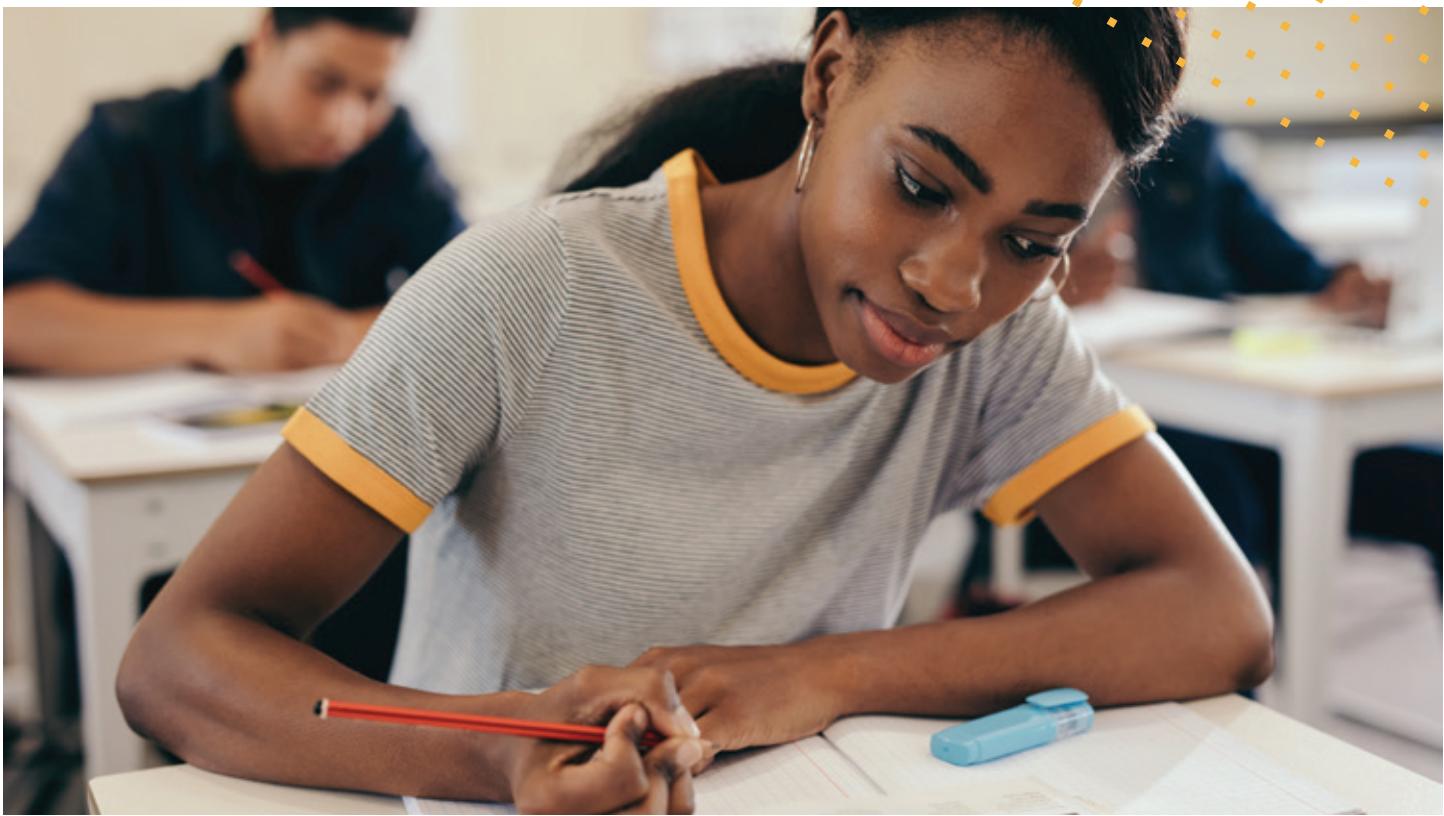
Oftentimes, students, families, and even educators are unaware of all facets of the McKinney-Vento Act, including the rights students experiencing homelessness have under the law. This can create a barrier to identifying these students and their families, as well as helping them access the supports they need.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires homeless liaisons to participate in professional development so that they can better identify and meet the needs of homeless children and youths, the rights they have under the act, and their specific educational needs. McKinney-Vento grant funding is directed to be used for professional development programs for school personnel to heighten their awareness of, and capacity to respond to, specific problems in the education of homeless children and youth.

Oftentimes, students, families, and even educators are unaware of all facets of the McKinney-Vento Act, including the rights students experiencing homelessness have under the law.

Several district staff discussed conducting McKinney-Vento trainings with all of the registrars or secretaries of their school buildings across the district. These staff members

²⁵ Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates, 2016.



are often the first people in a building that come in contact with a student experiencing homelessness. Understanding the rights of those students or the warning signs to look for to indicate a student may be unstably housed but unwilling to admit it can make a sizable impact.

Lubbock Independent School District (ISD) in Texas has reduced inconsistencies in the way staff interact with McKinney-Vento eligible students and families by providing scripts to homeless liaison and clerks. Often, if the first point of contact verbally identifies a family as “homeless,” it can be embarrassing or even offensive for the family. Providing appropriate language for staff members to use with families increases the sensitivity around identification and helps reduce stigma.

Placing a flier with the rights of students under the McKinney-Vento Act in all school and district buildings is also an easy way to quickly disseminate the information and expand awareness of the law. It can be a challenge for parents, students, and school staff alike to navigate the McKinney-Vento Act requirements and keep track of all of the supports available for students experiencing homelessness. The Homeless Education Liaison Program ([HELP](#)) in Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia created a resource that consolidates all of this information.

The Homeless Education Brochure lists student rights under McKinney-Vento and defines the term ‘homeless.’ It also lists contact information for local housing resources, 24-hour help lines, food resources, medical services, and

children’s resources. The brochure has been spotlighted as a helpful tool in trainings across Virginia.

Other districts highlighted additional trainings and programs they are using to ensure staff, students, and families are aware of the McKinney-Vento Act, its requirements for, and the rights for students experiencing homelessness.

Project HOPE: Virginia

Project HOPE-Virginia is a program funded through a federal grant, authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act, and coordinated by The College of William & Mary on behalf of the Virginia Department of Education. The program helps students experiencing homelessness attain educational success by ensuring enrollment and attendance in schools across the commonwealth. Project HOPE does this through public awareness campaigns across the state and subgrants to local school divisions, who create their own programs based on the needs of their students. Examples of expenses Project HOPE-Virginia covers throughout the year for students experiencing homelessness include mentoring, tutoring, summer enrichment, and domestic violence prevention programs. The local programs help provide referrals for health services, transportation, and school supplies.

Project HOPE-Virginia also has resources for parents and students experiencing homelessness to help understand their rights under McKinney-Vento. The William & Mary website even hosts a [list](#) with the contact information

of each homeless liaison in every school district across Virginia. These resources can also be helpful for liaison training. The “What Families Need to Know” brochure lists services schools provide and contact information for various agencies in English and Spanish.

District Liaison Network: New Hampshire

In 2012, a homeless liaison in Rochester, New Hampshire felt uninformed about the McKinney-Vento Act. Most school districts across the state had a single liaison whose homelessness role was added to their previous job titles without guidance. Recognizing that liaisons across the Seacoast region often communicated about transportation for students experiencing homelessness, the Rochester liaison felt it was important to become personally acquainted with his colleagues. The liaison network began with just liaisons in the Seacoast region, who invited the New Hampshire Homeless Education Director and liaisons from other regions to their initial sessions. The liaison was then awarded a grant to expand the liaison network across the state to promote professional development and collaboration.

After receiving the grant, the liaison from the Seacoast region tapped a ‘lead liaison’ in each of the other four regions in New Hampshire to join: Lakes, North Country, South Central, and Valley Regions. The grant includes funds for a small annual stipend for the lead liaisons’ time and effort and McKinney-Vento-related professional development. In addition to attending the state-wide McKinney-Vento Liaison orientation and spring forum, the lead liaison is tasked with creating two regional training programs each school year for the local liaisons in their region. This created four new opportunities for liaisons across the state to attend every year to connect with other liaisons, learn best practices, and hear from leading experts.

Given the limited amount of time educators have to spare, regional groups ensure that each event is worthwhile for liaisons attending. They have brought in speakers from organizations such as SchoolHouse Connection, passed out leading literature such as the book, *\$2.00 a Day*, and played a [video](#) about New Hampshire homelessness created by videographer and homelessness advocate, Diane Nilan. The events are well-attended and local liaison speak very highly of it. One liaison in a New Hampshire school system commented, “the trainings are very helpful... it gets us all into the room which can be magical to talk to the person you’re trying to connect with.”

Poverty Simulation: Michigan

One popular training tool for liaisons is a poverty simulation. Many school staff members have not experienced poverty or homelessness themselves, so poverty simulations raise

awareness and increase critical thinking about the daily challenges that students experiencing homelessness face. The Cadillac Area Public Schools in Michigan liaison noted that it allows staff to better understand what their students are going through day by day and hour by hour. For example, it helps explain that some kids do not have money for things that may really matter to the students, such as the book fair or a prom dress. In Cadillac, the poverty simulation is run by regional homeless liaisons and other state-level homeless and at-risk focused staff.

Through lectures, videos, and discussions, poverty simulations strive to have participants experience what families/individuals with a low income go through in their daily struggle with poverty, identify concrete steps they can take to help educate people in their communities, draft a plan for using the information learned in the session to use in their work, and indicate resources they can use to help create awareness around issues of poverty and homelessness (<https://www.povertysimulation.net/>).

State Grant Coordinators Support Group: Michigan

The liaisons and State Grant Coordinators in Michigan also have an open line of communication with one another. The Grant Coordinators Support Group is an online, email-based resource for state-level staff to use when they have unique questions about their work with youth experiencing homelessness. Homeless liaisons are also able to send in questions that get dispersed to the group. The email chain is a quick and convenient way to share expertise in a setting where no two situations are alike. For small districts looking for help like Alpena Public Schools in Michigan, it is also an easy way to connect with larger districts that have more resources. An Alpena staff member commented, “it’s a pretty strong group that works really well to benefit the kids and the family.”

Connections to Housing Resources

Too often, educators and housing providers operate in silos, making it difficult for the families of students experiencing homelessness to navigate a complex web of service providers. While this is partially due to the differing definitions of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), breaking down these barriers can make it much easier to allow families to access needed supports. Schools and districts can assist by working with housing organizations and agencies to connect families to these services. Schools and housing providers can become powerful partners to ensure stable housing, better supports, and better outcomes in school.

Too often, educators and housing providers operate in silos, making it difficult for the families of students experiencing homelessness to navigate a complex web of service providers.

Austin Independent School District in Texas partners with LifeWorks, a local youth serving organization, to help unaccompanied youth find housing and support services to ensure stability. Since unsheltered, unaccompanied minors cannot access services such as emergency hotel assistance due to age requirements, other services must be coordinated. LifeWorks provides emergency shelter, housing, and other services to youth experiencing homelessness through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program Grant (YHDP).

Through their partnership with Austin ISD, The LifeWorks Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program helps unaccompanied students who are couch-surfing or at imminent risk of becoming unsheltered identify a host home to live in for the remainder of the school year so that the youth do not end up homeless on the street. LifeWorks provides host families with bill-support and other resources to ensure unaccompanied students have a stable and consistent place to live for as long as possible.

In addition, one school district developed a partnership with the local Red Roof Inn for McKinney-Vento students and their families. The manager agreed to give families experiencing homelessness a discounted nightly rate, helping the school afford temporary housing for their students experiencing homelessness.

Flexible Funding for Housing Stability

In Roanoke City Schools in Virginia, the district has created the [Help the Homeless Fund](#) to help support various needs of the students and their families experiencing transient living. The Help the Homeless Fund is a flexible pool of money that the district uses to support students and families experiencing homelessness in a variety of ways. A large portion of the money raised is being used to offer support with housing stability, whether it is used to prevent an eviction or to help support the expenses of obtaining permanent housing. Other portions of the fund can be used to meet other needs related to housing stability.

The McKinney-Vento Program Coordinator provides a regular update for how many families and students have been assisted with these supportive funds. To date, the Help the Homeless Fund has spent over \$36,000 to support 243

families and 560 students, representing a highly leveraged option to provide community resources to those in need.

Money from the fund has been given to Roanoke Human Services, which houses the Central Intake and Assessment Program and the Continuum of Care (CoC) offices. If a family comes into the intake office for support related to housing, whether it be an eviction notice or utility shutoff, and they have a student in Roanoke City Schools, the district's McKinney-Vento liaison receives a referral from the city. Then the fund may be used to help ensure the families are able to stay housed. As the district website puts it, "The funding is being used to fill the gaps after all other community resources have been exhausted."

To continue to raise money for the fund, the school district works to build awareness of their homeless population in several ways. A few years ago, students from two high schools in Roanoke City Schools came together to create the Students Take Action in Roanoke (STAR) Council. The STAR Council works to build awareness of the number of students experiencing homelessness across the school district. It has set up a series of events that bring the community together to raise awareness, as well as raise money to support those experiencing homelessness in the district. The events include Breakfast with Santa and a charity dodgeball tournament that features both faculty and students. In 2019, the dodgeball tournament alone raised over \$13,000.²⁶ One hundred percent of the proceeds from events like these go to the Help the Homeless Fund.

Family Outreach

Communicating with families and parents experiencing homelessness can be crucial to ensuring that the resources in place for students experiencing homelessness are utilized. Many families are fearful of school authority because they are unaware of their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires LEAs to post public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youth where they receive homeless services. It also requires schools to provide written notice to the parent or guardian of a student experiencing homelessness twice a year explaining their rights under the act such as staying at one's school of origin, transportation, meals, and to not be stigmatized by school personnel. For unaccompanied youth, this notice is required to go to the youth.

Outreach and education can help alleviate the fear of school authority and ensure that support gets to those who need it. In interviews, we heard several examples of outreach efforts that sometimes included fun ways to get the community engaged.

²⁶ Simmons, T. Dodgeball tournament to benefit homeless students raises more than \$13,000, *10 News*, October 5, 2019.

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools (CIS) is a nonprofit organization that works directly in 2,300 schools in 25 states and the District of Columbia, building relationships that empower students to succeed inside and outside the classroom. CIS uses a School-based Coordinator to connect schools to the community resources available to them to help the nearly 12 million children under the age of 18 living in poverty in the U.S. In 2019, CIS served 1.56 million students and mobilized 42,000 volunteers. The results tell a clear story: 93 percent of CIS seniors graduated or earned a GED, 78 percent increased attendance, and 99 percent stayed in school.

CIS not only helps liaisons by connecting them with resources for students, it also serves as a great resource for homeless liaisons themselves. Their publications, such as the [2019 Community Matters Report](#), provide more research and data on CIS' programs and success.

Outreach and education can help alleviate the fear of school authority and ensure that support gets to those who need it.

Family Resource Centers: Austin, TX

In Austin Independent School District (TX), eight [Family Resource Centers](#) (FRCs) provide support, resources, and leadership opportunities that promote well-being, self-sufficiency, and family engagement across the district. The FRCs work closely with district parent support specialists and school liaisons to ensure families experiencing homelessness are aware and take advantage of the resource. FRCs provide support for families through direct services, referrals, and application assistance so that families may access support in areas such as basic needs, housing, employment, healthcare, parenting support, and continuing education. They also offer access to food pantries and counseling. Family Resource Centers are a partnership with the local nonprofit, Austin Voices for Education and Youth.

Hotel Registration Day: Spotsylvania, VA

Not only is it difficult to identify students experiencing homelessness due to the stigma around the issue, it is also sometimes difficult to ensure these students are registered for school due to their unstable housing.

One of the most effective ways to ensure students experiencing homelessness are registered for the school year is to take registration to them. At the end of each summer, Spotsylvania County Public Schools (SCPS) in Virginia hosts a 'Hotel Registration Day' to try and get students in the door on day one and keep them at their school of origin, especially if they were displaced over the summer.

Multiple teams consisting of school staff, including principals, secretaries, and social workers, all visit nearby hotels to register and meet students. SCPS also gives out backpacks to kids and local churches help make an event of the day by providing popsicles and hot dogs for the families. Hotel Registration Day also gives staff a chance to introduce themselves to parents and explain their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act, building positive relationships for students and families at the school that in turn can help increase engagement.

JumpStart: Virginia Beach, VA

On an annual basis since 2010, the McKinney-Vento program and School Social Work Services with Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) in Virginia has partnered with a local nonprofit, AidNow, to host [JumpStart](#), a back to school event that serves 400-500 students experiencing homelessness. The event brings the community together—local car dealerships, Walmart, Food Lion, and Payless all donate to provide two new outfits, underwear, socks, fresh food, and a pair of shoes that each child gets to pick out for themselves. The faith community and local businesses provide volunteers to serve as personal shoppers for the families.

Through McKinney-Vento and Title 1 funds, VBCPS gives out school supplies in backpacks donated by the Virginia Beach Schools Federal Credit Union, and literacy groups provide books for them to take home. Students can even get haircuts, vision and dental screenings, and in 2019, Chick-fil-A gave all attendees a sandwich. To prepare for JumpStart, School Social Work Services call parents over the summer to gather information on their current housing status in exchange for a ticket. In 2020, JumpStart won the National School Board Association's Magna Award for removing barriers for students.

Partnerships and Cross-System Collaboration

The most common refrain across districts and schools interviewed was the African proverb, "it takes a village," which was often mentioned as educators emphasized the importance of community partnerships and collaborations. Districts and schools are continually faced with limited capacity and resources, making

external partnerships essential to support students and families experiencing homelessness. Our conversations illuminated a wide variety of partnerships school districts have formed with faith-based organizations, nonprofits, corporations, and social service agencies in order to overcome this limited capacity.

In Clear Creek Independent School District in Texas, the district partnered with a local workforce agency to provide a daycare service for teen moms. Workforce Solutions, the local agency that is the public workforce system of the greater Houston-Galveston region, administers services to help employers find qualified workers and to help individuals build successful careers through education, training, and job information. Teen moms can access the daycare partnership in high school through their first year of postsecondary education. Daycare partnerships are pivotal for the population of youth experiencing homelessness, as research has indicated that pregnancy and parenthood is common among youth experiencing homelessness.²⁷

Most districts also spotlighted faith-based partnerships in their communities. In Lubbock Independent School District in Texas, Open Door is a faith-based organization that works to ensure every person in their community has a place to live. Their Open Door Community Center works with students and families to help get vital records, including birth certificates or Social Security cards. They also have a shelter that works with families to find transitional housing. In addition to Lubbock, nearly every district liaison interview touted at least one partnership with a community faith-based organization, such as churches.

Lions and Rotary Clubs were frequently mentioned as strong community partners as well, and some district liaisons mentioned the creation of community schools. For other communities, local chapters of nonprofit organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of America and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) are valuable resources for supporting youth experiencing homelessness. The Manchester School District in New Hampshire, for example, has a partnership with their local YMCA and Boys and Girls Club for McKinney-Vento students who need before or after school care, as well as summer programming.

Districts across the country have partnerships with unique community organizations, such as the ones listed below.

Change the World RVA: Richmond, VA

Change the World RVA (CTWRVA) is an all-volunteer organization that provides support to high school and college students in Richmond, Virginia who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Partnering with churches, organizations, and volunteers from the community, they strive to make meaningful impacts in each of their students' lives. As the only organization in the region of its kind, they provide access to resources and support for an array of needs. The core of CTWRVA is an afterschool program, but they also provide individualized services such help obtaining safe and stable housing; cell phones and monthly cell service; field trips and college visits; annual summer adventures; a student-run food pantry; emergency transportation and bus passes; and connection to healthcare and other community services. Change the World RVA continues to provide support to students during their college years, and college students and graduates return to provide leadership to the younger students. Unlike conventional organizations, CTWRVA is flexible enough to try to address every need that arises with their students by relying on their widespread network of community support.

For the Richmond Public School district, CTWRVA has been a supportive network that has evolved over the years to effectively and continuously meet the needs of its students. Programming takes place after school on Mondays and Thursdays. The afterschool program includes a mental health professional in order to provide formal support for potential trauma the students have experienced, as well as peer support. The relationships built in the program emotionally support the students as much as the provided physical resources, leading to positive personal and academic growth.

Basic Needs Network: Abilene, TX

The **Basic Needs Network** (BNN) is a collaboration of many organizations including United Way and A Call for Help. The network meets once a month and is open to all community members in West Central Texas. In 2018, 141 people attended the meetings, representing 40 businesses and organizations from across the area. At last count, the network had served 12,986 clients in 2019 from all ages and walks of life, totaling nearly \$1 million worth of services. The top services provided by BNN include food (through food pantries, packed lunches, and 'homeless kits'), clothing, shelter, and electric bills. BNN also spends money on birth certificates, identification cards, grocery cards, car seats, and security deposits for those in need.

²⁷ Dworsky, A., Morton, M. H., & Samuels, G. M. *Missed opportunities: Pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness in America*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2018.



Monument Academy Public Charter School

At Monument Academy Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., both the student population and the school model are designed to ensure every one of them has the supports they need to stay on track. Monument is a weekday boarding school for the highest risk students and their families enmeshed in different systems—students who are homeless, in foster care, had contact with the juvenile justice, are trauma-impacted and more. Thirty-five percent of students at Monument Academy are homeless in a city whose homeless crisis has doubled since 2014. Couples who serve as surrogate parents during the week house and support students at Monument with everything from homework to healthy meals to counseling.

Schools like Monument can be pillars of stability for students whose lives are chaotic and traumatic—and a model for the nation. Schools such as Monument can help in at least three ways.

First, schools are increasingly recognizing that personalized education that deliberately fosters the social and emotional well-being of children leads to better outcomes. Addressing the needs of the whole child helps keep students in school and on track.

Second, schools are in a strong position to provide and broker the necessary wrap around services that homeless students and their peers often need. Addressing trauma, mental health challenges, and other practical life issues like food insecurity, lack of a stable place to do homework, and transportation requires a dedicated team of teachers, counselors, clinicians and homeless liaisons who work seamlessly together. The liaison at Monument brokers supports that include finding stable housing, ensuring regular meals, and facilitating mental health supports for homeless students.

Third, schools can go big and bold and offer weekday boarding with a high return on investment. Monument cites things such as providing washing machines so students don't feel stigmatized by unclean clothes; two caring adults around the clock who house the students onsite and act as surrogates; and a predictable place to sleep, eat nutritious food, and experience extended day enrichment. Higher academic attainment, reduced need for special education services, increased graduation rates and better outcomes in postsecondary education and employment all offset the higher initial cost for schools.

This is an excerpt from the op-ed, “New Hope for the Homeless” published in Thrive Global on March 14, 2019 by John Bridgeland, Founder & CEO of Civic, and Emily Bloomfield, Founder & CEO of Monument Academy Public Charter School (<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/new-hope-for-the-homeless/>).

For the Abilene Independent School District, this meeting is a great resource to network with local McKinney-Vento liaisons from outside districts and resource providers and ask for extra support. This network is also invaluable for smaller, surrounding school districts that do not have access to as many organizations willing to help. When a child is in need, the community rallies around the liaison to provide whatever support is needed. The community response has been so positive that “it’s almost a full-time job managing the marketing and volunteers.”

MAP Clinics: Fairfax County, VA

Fairfax County Public Schools’ (FCPS) central office in Virginia has partnered with George Mason University, a local public college, to create a medical clinic inside their registration office called the Mason and Partners (MAP) clinic as a broader effort of George Mason University. MAP interprofessional clinics serve uninsured, immigrant, and refugee communities within Prince William and Fairfax counties in Northern Virginia.

MAP is a free clinic that provides healthcare for vulnerable populations located in low income and medically underserved areas. The MAP clinic in FCPS offers a range of services including physicals, acute primary care visits, depression screenings and referrals, and various screenings or treatment initiation for hypertension, diabetes, asthma, and hearing or vision problems.

While all at-need students at Fairfax County Public Schools are eligible for services through MAP clinics, it has been particularly helpful for students experiencing homelessness due to its proximity. Oftentimes, when a student experiencing homelessness enrolls in school, they are in need of medical services of some kind, whether it be a medical or mental health professional, or a dentist. Sometimes, students are in need of a physical to enroll in school or play a sport (though McKinney-Vento forbids schools from denying immediate enrollment to students because they lack medical forms). Thanks to MAPs, the student receives a referral and is able to attain these services in the central office building. This has been especially helpful for unaccompanied youth that face difficulties in having their medical needs met outside of school.

Since MAP is a bridge-care model, the clinics also help any student treated to find more permanent medical services in the community for ongoing medical needs.

Health Department Partnership:

Loudoun County, VA

Loudoun County Public Schools in Virginia has a partnership with the Virginia Department of Health for their McKinney-Vento students to get free Tuberculosis screenings, a requirement to attend school. A voucher is given to the parent at school and once completed, it is submitted to the McKinney-Vento team for review and signature. If approved, the McKinney-Vento team returns the form to the school and gives it to the parent. The parent then can make an appointment with the Health Department which allows for the screening, including any necessary follow-ups for free.

Social and Emotional Learning

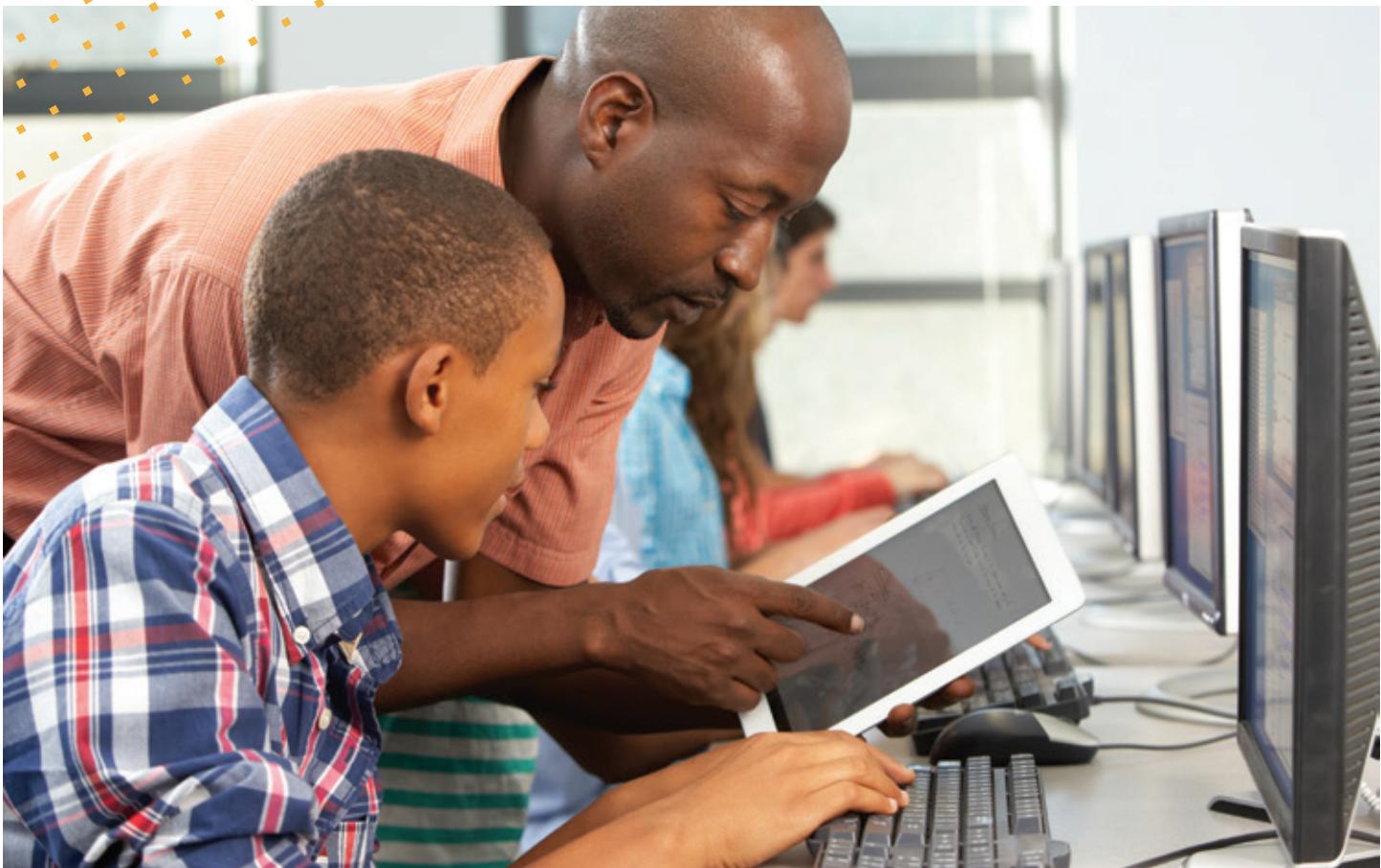
More than two decades of research demonstrate that promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) benefits students’ academic performance, improves classroom behavior, and increases students’ ability to manage stress.²⁸ Thanks to the work of organizations like the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (**CASEL**) and their resources, including a SEL District Resource Center and their Collaborating Districts Initiative, more districts and schools are embedding SEL into every aspect of school life.

Embedding social and emotional learning in schools can simply begin as an intentional effort to build positive relationships between students and adults in the school building and taking an “every student counts” approach. Most districts we spoke with recognized the important role relationship-building plays in educating their students experiencing homelessness. With positive adult relationships, students are more likely to feel engaged at school and feel comfortable approaching educators regarding their housing instability.

With positive adult relationships, students are more likely to feel engaged at school and feel comfortable approaching educators regarding their housing instability.

Some districts we spoke with are actively working to embed social and emotional learning in their classrooms. For example, Lubbock Independent School District in Texas is currently piloting a SEL Division with

²⁸ Durlak, J., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions, *Child Development*, 2011.



licensed school specialists in 16 schools. Other schools have focused on ensuring students can access mental health supports or trauma-informed care. While these services are not substitutes for intentionally and systemically embedding SEL into school and district curricula, ensuring students' access to mental health support is an essential component to social and emotional development. Below are additional examples of what districts are doing throughout the country.

Alexandria City Public Schools, VA

In Alexandria, Virginia, the school district partnered with social services to provide mental health services for students experiencing homelessness and their families after their housing status is verified. Since many families experiencing homelessness lack a permanent address, they often cannot access mental health services. The district liaison in Alexandria City Public Schools who formerly worked in social services reached out to the Mental Health supervisor to form the partnership. Now, about six years later, students and their families can often access mental health services free of charge due to a

lack of insurance and for those with insurance, they are referred to their insurance provider.

The liaison attributed the collaboration to ACPS' increased identification of McKinney-Vento students and noted that many parents do not realize they are considered homeless once evicted. If the liaison knows a family is moving to a shelter in advance, free breakfast and lunch can be set up with parental consent for the children at school the next day. In addition, the family is connected to a school social worker to help stabilize and address the student's socio-emotional needs, which supports the students staying at their school of origin. School social workers also ensure that students receive tangible support such as backpacks filled with school supplies.

Cadillac Area Public Schools, MI

Kids who have experienced trauma or homelessness benefit from trauma-informed schools with extra supports.²⁹ One school in Cadillac Area Public Schools in Michigan helps students self-regulate with the help of a soothing sensory path in the special education classroom. Students can

²⁹ Venet, Alex Shevrin, The How and Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching, Edutopia, August 3, 2018. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-trauma-informed-teaching>.

follow the path which incorporates many types of body movement activities to assist in self-regulation.

Other students who have been identified as a child experiencing trauma have routine snack breaks built into their day. Students who have experienced trauma also need co-regulated activities because they haven't learned to self-soothe or regulate, so teachers are strongly encouraged to incorporate the activities into their classrooms every 30-60 minutes. For example, a teacher will tell a joke to get the class laughing and take a 15 second break from the learning material. The school also provides extra, individual accommodations. If a student cannot sit still during class time, they are given special seating such as a rocking chair or given bigger areas in which to move around.

When a student need is identified, whatever it might be, the school works hard to accommodate the need so all of their students have the opportunity to be successful. However, changing the culture to accommodate today's students and families is a constant work in progress that they continue to work to improve. The school plans to expand this sensory path to the main hallway and provide teachers with sensory toolboxes for their classrooms.

Crockett Early College High School, TX

In 2012, Vida Clinic launched as a pilot program at Crockett High School in Austin, Texas. It has now expanded to 54 campuses with a mission to provide access to quality, clinical mental care services to every student, parent, and staff member on campus. Implemented to address mental health in schools, Vida strives to create a safe, nurturing environment on school campuses and de-stigmatize mental health issues in order to help students thrive. Therapists use an ecological model to ensure sustainable practices and results, involving the parents and educators when deemed necessary for success. They also employ compassionate techniques to help the students manage strong emotions both in and out of school. Vida's goal is to not only help on the individual level, but to create a culture of empathy and resilience in the schools they serve.

As its first campus, Crockett High School reaps the benefits of offering a mental health clinic directly on school grounds. This creates a space where students can heal from the stress and traumas of past and current situations in order to ease mental burdens and allow a higher focus on academic achievement. Working in collaboration with school communities, underserved communities have access to mental health support without the worries of financial need or language barriers.

Spotsylvania County Public Schools, VA

Realizing that their population of students experiencing homelessness has more complex trauma than many of their other students, Spotsylvania County Public Schools in Virginia brought in outside groups to help create trauma sensitive schools. To start, the district had all social workers become "Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy (TFCBT) Trained." The district has worked with the Attachment and Trauma Network to conduct trainings that any school who wishes to form a trauma team can attend. The Attachment and Trauma Network has done multiple on-site trainings in Spotsylvania County Schools. These trainings have occurred over the past three years, with this year focusing on individualized school trainings.

According to district staff, this has been very successful in terms of Spotsylvania County Public Schools becoming a trauma-sensitive school system. More and more, educators are using the language, techniques, and practices from their trainings, which has led to the district seeing a difference with their student population's discipline rates, nurse's visits, and classroom management. As the district liaison said, "We believe it all started from the McKinney-Vento work we were doing in educating folks in the school system and community."

In addition, the district has started conducting a suicide ideation assessment on all of their students experiencing homelessness in high school since the district knows there is a high propensity for students that are highly mobile to have suicide ideation. The assessment tool allows the district to ensure students in need of additional mental health supports receive them.

Transportation

The McKinney-Vento Act requires that SEAs and LEAs provide transportation to students experiencing homelessness to and from their school of origin. If a student lives in a different district than their school of origin, it is up to the LEAs to agree upon the responsibility for the costs of said transportation. The parent or guardian of a student experiencing homelessness must be fully informed of all transportation options and be assisted in getting their child to school.

Consistently in the interview process, district liaisons and school staff emphasized that their difficulty in meeting the transportation needs of their students experiencing homelessness is due to lack of resources, capacity, and public transit options. Bus driver shortages impact many districts, and one even claimed to have a shortage of 40 drivers. As one of the most common barriers to educating students experiencing homelessness, school

and district liaisons pointed to a number of solutions, including transportation coordinators and utilizing ride-share options.

For example, Cadillac Area Public Schools in Michigan is fortunate enough to have a public bus system. Students experiencing homelessness who cannot take the school bus because they live outside of district lines are given bus tickets for the public bus. Although not all school districts have this system to rely on, the creativity Cadillac Area Public Schools and others employ to get their students to school emphasizes the major barrier transportation is to student success.

Continually in the interview process, district liaisons and school staff emphasized their difficulty in meeting the transportation needs of their students experiencing homelessness is due to lack of resources, capacity, and public transit options.

Transportation Coordinator

Several districts discussed employing a staff member to coordinate the transportation of students experiencing homelessness. This staff member is often paid through the use of Title I funds.

Loudoun County Public Schools in Virginia recently hired a staff member to serve as the point person for transportation. Due to lack of staff and resources, transportation for students experiencing homelessness was often delayed while the McKinney-Vento team contacted various transportation options and found effective routes. Now, the designated transportation coordinator handles all requests electronically at the school level for any student without regular transportation. The funding for the new staff person came from the McKinney-Vento grant, Title I funds, and transportation funds. The Rochester School District in New Hampshire also has a staff member whose primary responsibility is managing the cost and routes of students' transportation, funded by Title I.

Iosco Regional Education Service Agency in Michigan has four Transportation Directors in each of the local education agencies they oversee. This includes Oscoda, Tawas, Hale, and Whittemore-Prescott Area Schools. Each Director is familiar with the McKinney-Vento requirements

and they work together to connect bus routes at district lines so that students experiencing homelessness can easily reach their school of origin. The district liaisons train the transportation directors on the McKinney-Vento Act and work to keep them communicating with one another.

HopSkipDrive

HopSkipDrive (HSD) is a reliable and safe transportation solution for families and school districts who are struggling to get their students where they need to go each day. HSD serves the Northern and Southern California, Colorado Front Range, Northern Virginia, District of Columbia, Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, Arizona, Washington, and Las Vegas areas. Having served over 650,000 kids, HSD has a proven record of safety and reliability as a dedicated Safe Ride team monitors every ride to ensure safe driving practices. Founded by working moms, HSD maintains high standards for the drivers that are employed, proven by CareDrivers being 35 percent safer drivers than the average person and their requirement to pass a 15-point certification to be hired.

HSD offers practical transportation support to those in need. Services include one-time rides, recurring transportation, and school district and family accessibility, supporting a variety of needs. Multiple districts throughout the country have contracted with HopSkipDrive to meet the transportation needs of their students experiencing homelessness.

RATS: Deer Park, TX

One creative solution to a lack of public transportation and shortage of bus drivers is the RATS program in Deer Park Independent School District in Texas. Supported by Title I funds, the Retirees Assisting with Transitional Students (RATS) program rehired retirees such as coaches and other former school personnel to drive transitional students to and from school, some over 20 to 30 miles each way. District staff believe the program has been instrumental in ensuring the attendance of their students experiencing homelessness and point to the program as one of the biggest factors in increasing their graduation rate for these students. By using the same driver each day for specific routes, the students and retirees are able to build a relationship. This allows the student to be more comfortable with their driver, as well as feel accountable to the adult they formed a connection with who is consistently there to transport them to school. Additionally, thanks to this relationship, the retiree gets to know the family who is then more likely to share updates on their housing situation. This allows the retiree to notify the school if one of their students is absent or has a change of address.

CONCLUSION

America has awakened to its homeless student crisis. Schools and districts are innovating and implementing ways to ensure that barriers to success in school are addressed systematically and effectively. As the population of students experiencing homelessness continues to rise and identification efforts improve, states, districts, and schools need to learn from one another to fully implement the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and ensure achievement and graduation gaps between students experiencing homelessness and their housed peers are closed.

Every student, regardless of their background, race, ethnicity, disability, language proficiency, or housing circumstances should be given an equal chance to thrive in school and realize their potential. These case studies offer more hope and can accelerate the movement to ensure millions of students are no longer ‘hidden in plain sight’ without the supports and guidance they are entitled to under McKinney-Vento and as human beings.

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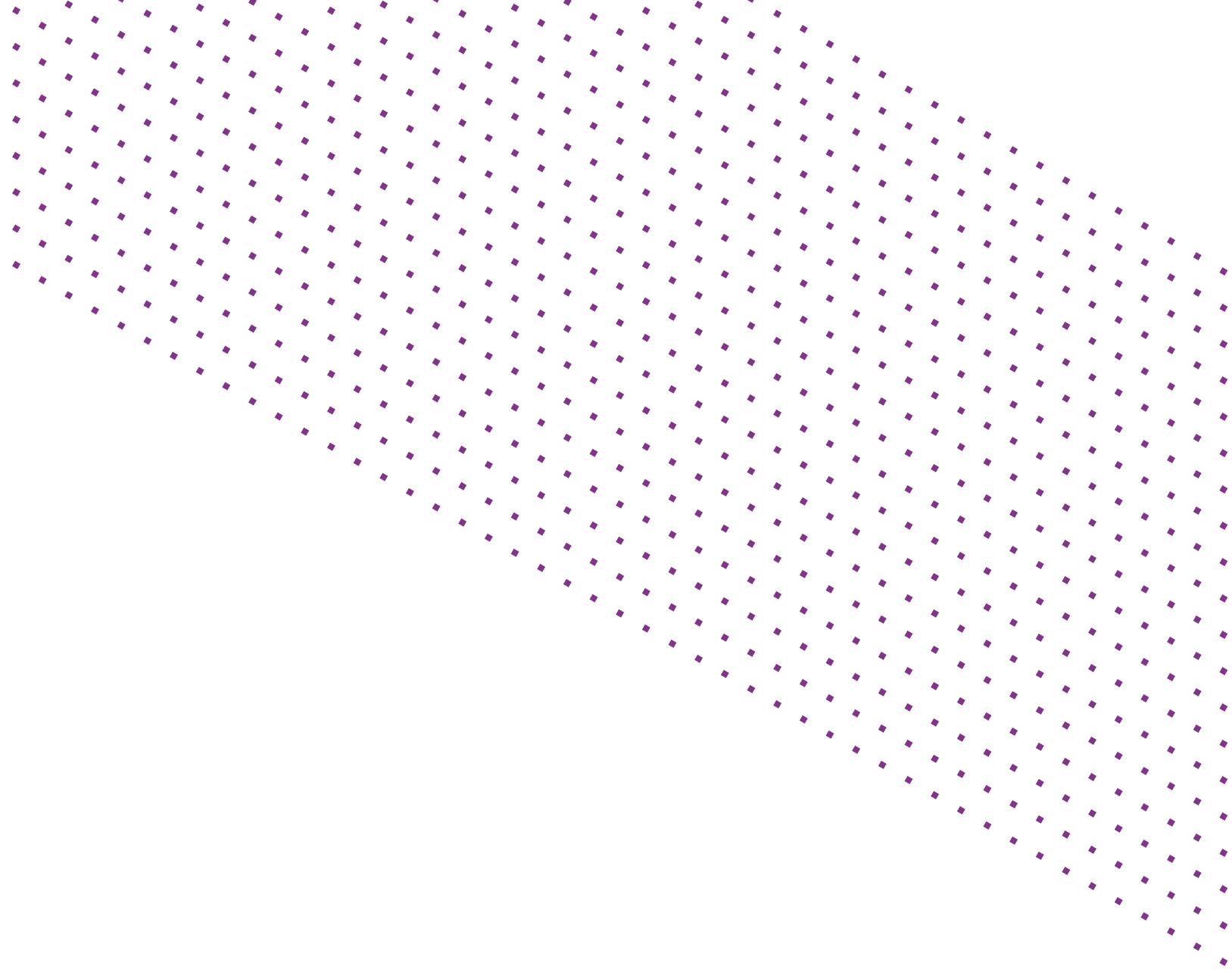
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