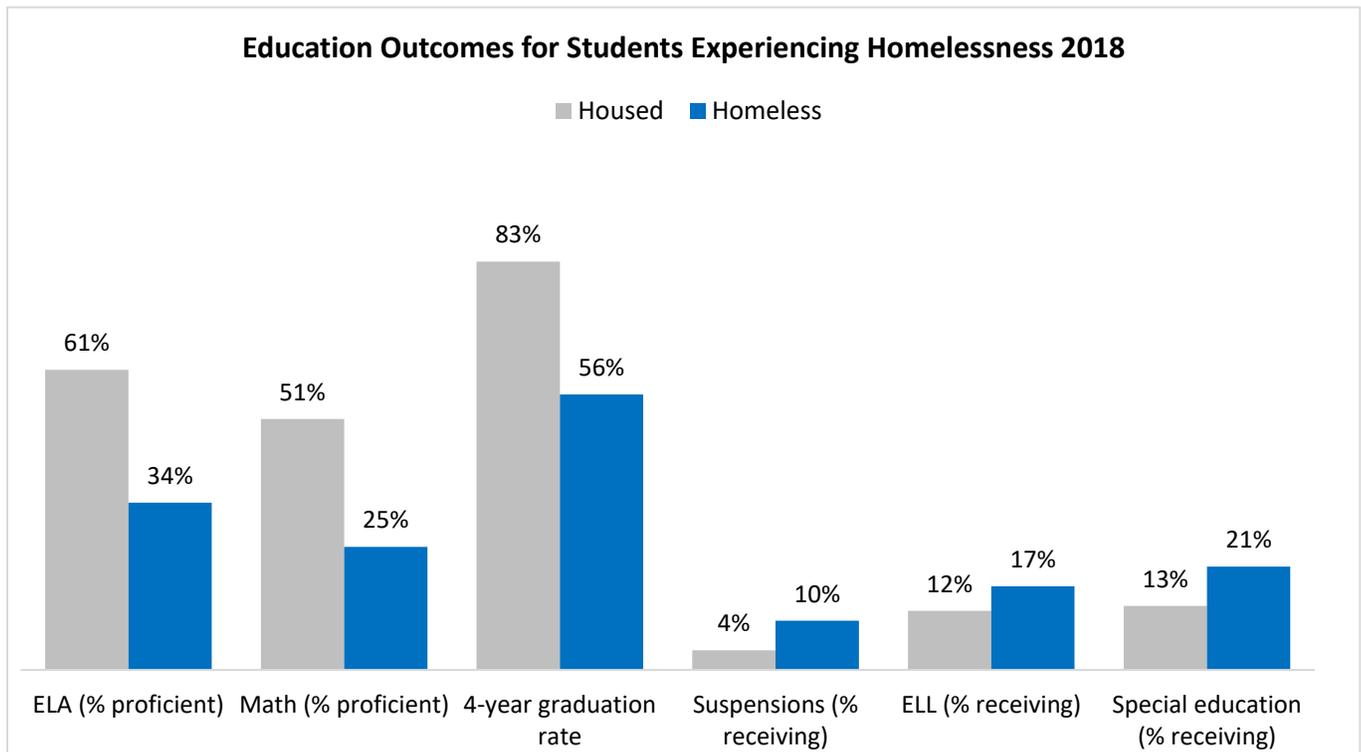




Using Federal Relief Funding to Advance Education Equity for Students Experiencing Homelessness

Introduction

Students experiencing homelessness face many barriers to academic success. Compared to their housed peers, students experiencing homelessness score lower on proficiency tests and are less likely to graduate from high school. **These outcomes are not inevitable. When students connect with caring adults, receive targeted supports, and avoid multiple school moves, they can and do succeed.**



Scope of the Challenge and the Equity Imperative

Between 2019 and 2020, Washington State had one of the largest increases in family homelessness in the country.¹ In the 2017-18 school year, more than 40,000 students were identified as experiencing homelessness as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act.² COVID-19 has added to the challenge. It made it more difficult for schools to spot the signs of homelessness. It made it impossible for some students to stay connected to school, and for those that did, data show that students experiencing homelessness had one of the largest increases in the average number of absences per student.³ This means that in the months to come, finding and re-engaging students experiencing homelessness will be one of our school system’s most urgent challenges – a challenge we must take on if we are true to our commitments to racial equity. Before COVID-19, two-thirds of students

¹ See The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, at p.34, accessed at: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

² See Students Experiencing Homelessness in Washington’s K-12 Public Schools: Trends, Characteristics, and Academic Outcomes, at p. 7, accessed at: https://schoolhousewa.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolhouseWA_OutcomesReport_2019.pdf.

³ <https://www.k12.wa.us/data-reporting/data-displays/monthly-enrollment-and-absences-display>.

experiencing homelessness in Washington State were students of color,⁴ and this pandemic has further exacerbated underlying racial inequities in our communities.⁵

Federal Relief Funds Include Designated Funds to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) designates \$800 million of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) specifically to support students experiencing homelessness. Washington is expected to receive approximately \$12 million, the majority of which will be distributed to school districts. These specifically designated funds must be used to **identify, provide wraparound services to, and assist students experiencing homelessness in attending school and participating fully in school activities.**

These funds will not be sufficient to meet the full needs of your students experiencing homelessness, and it is not expected that they should. These are just the specifically designated funds for McKinney-Vento eligible students. It is expected that the additional, larger amounts of recovery funds that districts will receive as part of the ARP ESSER funds will be used to address lost instructional time, comprehensive afterschool programming, and summer learning and enrichment for students impacted by COVID-19, **especially those furthest from educational justice, including students experiencing homelessness.**⁶

As you prepare to submit your district's Academic and Student Well-Being Recovery Plan by the June 1st deadline, here are **four things you can do to make sure the plan accounts for the needs of students experiencing homelessness and advances your equity goals:**

1. Include your McKinney-Vento district liaison and building points of contact in district planning both for the specific McKinney-Vento funds and for the larger Academic and Student Well-Being Recovery Plan;
2. Use data relevant to student stability to identify gaps and target resources to eliminate racial inequities;
3. Expand your reach and capacity through partnerships with community-based organizations; and
4. Use federal dollars creatively to provide flexible transportation and support housing stability.

1. Include Your District McKinney-Vento Liaison and Building Points of Contact in District Planning

Even as you move quickly to meet planning deadlines, it is essential to include your district McKinney-Vento liaisons and building points of contact in plan development. They hold great knowledge and experience in identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness, a group of students that sits furthest from educational justice.

Because liaisons will still be busy with the work of identifying and engaging students, it may be necessary to include an increase in staffing resources to your McKinney-Vento team in the early stages of your plan.

2. Use Data Relevant to Student Stability to Identify Gaps and Target Resources to Eliminate Racial Inequities

⁴ <https://schoolhousewa.org/data/analysis/academic-outcomes-for-students-experiencing-homelessness-are-low-across-the-state-of-washington/>.

⁵ See, for example, data on COVID-19 morbidity rates published by Washington State Department of Health, at:

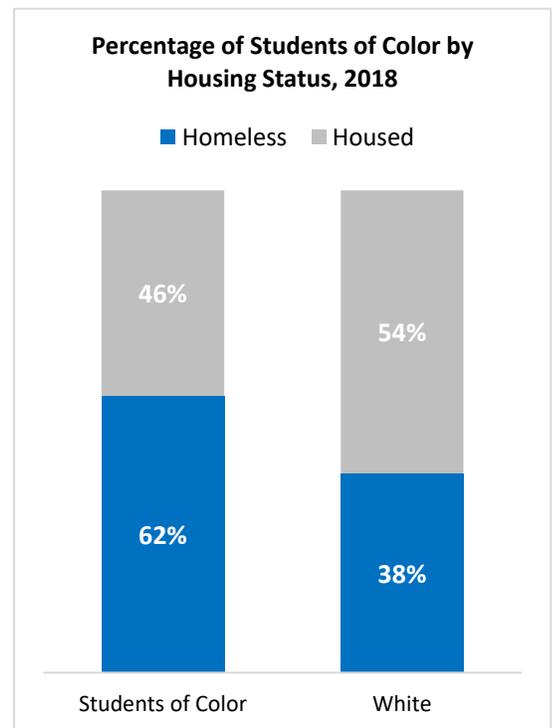
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/data-tables/COVID-19MorbidityMortalityRaceEthnicityLanguageWAState.pdf>.

⁶ <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/communications/2021docs/OSPI-Academic-and-Student-Well-Being-Recovery-Plan-Planning-Guide.pdf>

How many students in your district are identified as McKinney-Vento eligible? What are their grade levels (remember to include pre-k students!)? What schools do they attend? What are their attendance rates? How many students might you be missing? Remember, before COVID-19, two-thirds of the students experiencing homelessness in Washington State were students of color.⁷ This means **no effort to eliminate the racial equity gap in education can succeed without understanding and directly addressing the needs of students of color who do not have stable housing.**

Start by pulling together the following data with your district McKinney-Vento Liaison, enrollment department, and each of your school buildings:

- Numbers and demographics of students identified as McKinney-Vento eligible in each of the 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021 school years (to look for possible decrease in identification during COVID-19 closures).
- Numbers and demographics of students dropped from enrollment, or otherwise identified as not eligible to be counted for apportionment due to 20 days of consecutive absence in the 2020-2021 school year (to identify where you may need additional resources to track down, identify and re-engage students).
- Attendance rates of students identified as McKinney-Vento eligible for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years (to understand the scope of need for identified students).
- Numbers of students identified as McKinney-Vento eligible who are also eligible for special education, English learner, Migrant, or other specialized services (to identify where to pull in additional team members to support reconnection and recovery efforts).



In addition to quantitative data, it is important to collect qualitative data to provide context and meaning to the experiences of students and families experiencing homelessness in your district.⁸

- Work with your liaisons and other staff to develop and conduct a student and family survey of needs. Ensure that staff have necessary language access supports (interpretation and translation) to communicate with families.

Based on your data and information from students and families, consider how you can best use the targeted funding to identify, provide wraparound services to, and assist students experiencing homelessness. If your data show racial or ethnic disparities, target resources first to those racial or ethnic communities hardest hit.

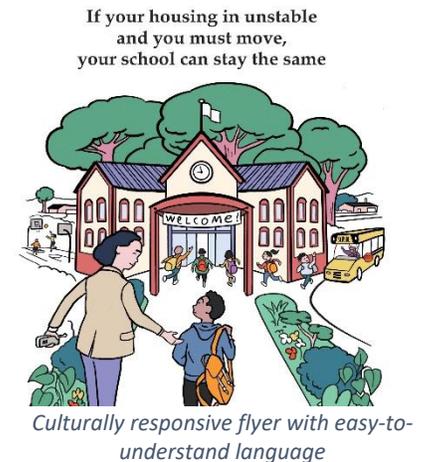
⁷ <https://schoolhousewa.org/data/analysis/academic-outcomes-for-students-experiencing-homelessness-are-low-across-the-state-of-washington/>.

⁸See, for example, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/using-data-advance-racial-equity>

3. Expand Your Reach and Capacity through Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations

The earlier your school staff know that a student may qualify for McKinney-Vento supports, the more effective they can be in minimizing disruptions and maintaining school stability. Consider how you can leverage your funds through partnerships with community-based organizations, including native and tribal communities. This might include allocating funds to:

- **Increase identification efforts by partnering with community-based organizations**, such as those serving native and tribal communities to develop and deliver culturally responsive and welcoming messages that will resonate with communities and families.
- **Provide wraparound supports in partnership with community-based organizations** in an accessible and welcoming setting.
- **Use ongoing community partnerships to increase families' access to stabilizing resources** including Pandemic EBT and housing resources.
- **Work with partners to anticipate and prepare to respond to increased needs when eviction moratoria are lifted.** Consider how you will work with families that have never had to ask for help before and may be on the verge of losing their housing or jobs.



4. Use Your Federal Dollars Creatively to Provide Flexible Transportation and Support Housing Stability

- **Flexible Transportation** - Transportation costs for McKinney-Vento eligible students were high before COVID-19 and we expect they will increase. The Department of Education clarifies that **ARP Homeless I and II funds can be used to provide transportation to enable children and youth to attend classes and participate fully in school activities.**⁹ Full participation may require transportation to help students participate in wraparound services, summer school, and extracurricular activities during the summer or school year.
- **Tackle the Root Cause by Supporting Housing Stability** - For students experiencing homelessness, a root cause of their educational challenges is housing instability. These federal recovery funds allow some room for districts to work creatively with their community partners to tackle this root cause.
 - Know the providers in your local community that have access to funding for emergency rental assistance and other homelessness assistance and supportive services.
 - Consider using Diversion, a creative, person-centered, problem solving approach that uses a trained provider or counselor to build upon a student or family's strengths to help them solve their own housing crisis by finding permanent housing solutions outside of the mainstream crisis response system.¹⁰ School staff can be trained in Diversion or your district could partner with a community-based organization who can train staff in this and provide flexible funding that families may need.

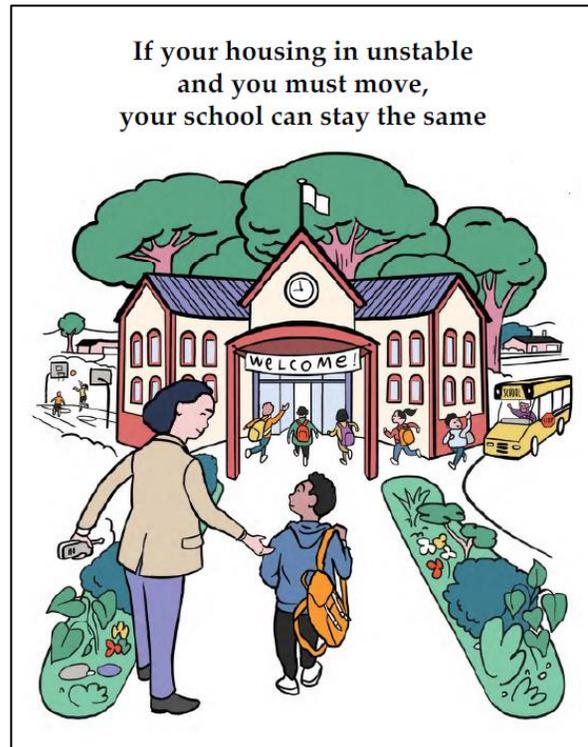
⁹ <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/04/ARP-Homeless-DCL-4.23.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://schoolhousewa.org/ideas/creativity-abounds-diversion-in-housing-and-schools/>

Learn more about how to best support students experiencing homelessness in Washington:

- [Menu of Strategies](#) – a working collection of recommendations for schools, districts, and community partners to better support students and families experiencing homelessness in Washington State.
- [How Schools Can Help Students Beat the Odds](#) - a report by Building Changes examining how schools and districts are helping to support students experiencing homelessness beat the odds and do well in schools.
- [Students Experiencing Homelessness in Washington’s K-12 Public Schools: Trends, Characteristics, and Academic Outcomes, 2015-2018](#) – a data analysis by Building Changes that compares academic outcomes among students experiencing homelessness, students living in low-income households, and those in stable housing.

If you would like a copy of the flyers below to use in your district, please contact, Liza Burell, Program Director at liza.burell@buildingchanges.org.



Building Changes’ Mission and Vision

Building Changes advances equitable responses to homelessness in Washington State, with a focus on children, youth, and families and the systems that serve them. We believe communities thrive when people have safe and stable housing and can equitably access and use services. To learn more, visit <http://www.buildingchanges.org>.