Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness During School Re-Opening

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
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Special Thanks!

Special Thanks to [SchoolHouse Connection](#)!

DPI Education Forward

- [Education Forward](#) document released with recommendations for LEAs while planning for school reopening.

- As the homeless liaison- be at the table for planning and ensure students experiencing homelessness are considered when making decisions.

- Ensure the homeless liaison has the capacity to meet the liaison duties and is able to adapt the work to a different learning environment.

Outreach, Identification, Communication

Challenges:
- Increased mobility of McKinney-Vento students and families
- Maintaining contact with McKinney-Vento students, including unaccompanied homeless youth
- Identifying families and youth who became homeless
- Understanding the definition and nature of homelessness

Strategies:
- Coordinate district responses and resources
- Identify and target funding for outreach and support - personnel, pre-paid cell phones
- Support coordinated outreach to campgrounds, motels, laundromats, grocery stores, food pantries, etc.
- Provide information about homeless services and contact information for the district's homeless liaison at meal distribution sites
- Provide training to liaisons
    - DPI EHCY Training Resources
    - SchoolHouse Connection Back to School Training Resources

Related Resources

Washington State

- Homeless Education Posters and Brochures for Outreach- for download

- Available in 9 languages

- Website provides best practices for maximizing outreach

SchoolHouse Connection

- Checklist: Keeping in Touch with Students and Families Experiencing Homelessness During School Closures

Distance Learning

Challenges:
- Lack of internet
- Lack of devices
- Lack of electricity
- Lack of safe, stable environment conducive to learning
- Lack of transportation to reach internet spots or pick up devices

Strategies:
- Use district funds, Title I, Part A, or ESSER funds to pay for devices (chromebooks, hotspots, etc.)
- Increase the amount of the Title I homeless reservation or use ESSER funds to support students or the work of the homeless liaison
- Get creative about providing internet access (examples: mobile internet access, expanding district wifi, etc.)
- Share learning models that respond to housing realities - shorter chunks of assignments and credits
- Reach out to shelters to help arrange spaces and technology for students to learn

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Challenges:

- Isolation
- Lack of mentorship, guidance, and academic support
- FAFSA determinations and postsecondary planning support

Strategies:

- Encourage regular check-ins with youth
- Inform and engage other allies to support liaisons (equity, counselors, nurses, social workers, transportation, Title III, etc.)
- Review how partial credits are awarded for work completed
- Complete FAFSA verification letters
  - [SchoolHouse Connection Sample Letters to Determine Independent Student Status](#)

Young Children

Challenges:

- Appropriate food items
- Physical safety in motels, shelters, or other temporary locations
- Mental health and development
- Preschool enrollment (deadlines, completing enrollment, etc.)

Strategies:

- Ask families about young children
- Inform and engage other allies to support liaisons (preschool, Head Start, special education, early intervention, child care, etc.)
- Assist with online enrollment or completing enrollment paperwork
- Watch the DPI EHCY Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Webinar

Health, Mental Health, Basic Needs

Challenges:
- Access to temporary housing for self-isolation, recovery, and safety
- Food: access, delivery
- Access to hygiene and health products and services
- Increased mental health stressors and lack of services

Strategies:
- Inform and engage allies at housing agencies
- Seek out community partners and help families access partners
- Provide hygiene products during food distribution
- Provide additional food for weekends
- Provide virtual mental health services via school staff or community partners

Key Considerations for Reopening

Every local educational agency (LEA) must have a liaison currently in place with **adequate capacity** to identify McKinney-Vento students and ensure their enrollment, full participation, and equitable access to services.

- Assess the liaison capacity
  - SchoolHouse Connection Assessment Tool
- Designate school site-level liaisons to increase the LEA's overall capacity to respond to homelessness.
- DPI EHCY Role of the Homeless Liaison Webinar

Key Considerations for Reopening

Liaisons and other school staff should reach out to known or suspected students experiencing homelessness <u>now</u>, to help them prepare for the next school year. Talk with students about a plan to communicate with them about returning in the fall and during the school year.

- Be sure to inform students and families of their rights to:
    - Stay in their school of origin, whether school opens in the fall only online, or a combination of online and in-person.
    - Immediate enrollment if they do seek to enroll in a new school.
    - Access to free school meals, as well as assistance with accessing distance learning, and transportation to their school of origin if schools are open full- or part-time.
    - SchoolHouse Connection: [Know Your Rights Flyers](#)

Key Considerations for Reopening

Have systems in place to identify returning McKinney-Vento students, as well as students who are newly experiencing homelessness to match the new environment.

- Embed questions and information about homelessness in all school or district outreach efforts, including: food pick-up or delivery; mailing of learning packets; emails or other communications to all parents/students; school/district automated calling systems; and the school/district website, Facebook page, and other social media.
  - SchoolHouse Connection flyers
  - NCHE posters and brochures
- Ensure that trained staff are available to connect with McKinney-Vento families and over the summer.

Key Considerations for Reopening

Ensure that LEA and/or school enrollment systems, whether online or in-person, accommodate the needs of families and youth experiencing homelessness.

- Provide registrars and other enrollment personnel adequate training on McKinney-Vento.
  - [DPI EHCY Training Resources](#)
  - SchoolHouse Connection: [Back to School Training Resources](#)
- Ensure online enrollment systems are accessible and understandable to parents and youth experiencing homelessness, with information about the McKinney-Vento Act. Online systems must provide a way for parents and students to enroll without typically required documents, such as proof of residency, health records, or guardianship, and an internal mechanism to refer potentially homeless students to the liaison.

Key Considerations for Reopening

Be prepared to address barriers to enrollment and retention in school, including ensuring access to COVID-related supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE), hygiene supplies, clothing, and laundry.

- Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for resources that will be provided to all students, or to low-income students. Deliver or mail resources to students who lack transportation to pick them up.
- Ensure McKinney-Vento students have equitable access to all school activities, whether online or in-person.

Key Considerations for Reopening

If distance learning will be part of reopening, make sure schools are prepared to ensure students experiencing homelessness can access the internet, devices, meals, academic support, and adult mentorship.

- Provide students with unlimited high-speed data, including through hotspots and cellphone data and minutes, to ensure students can complete all assignments and stay connected with liaisons, teachers, mentors, and peers.
- Plan to meet learning challenges beyond basic connectivity and devices, such as providing portable chargers for students without access to electricity; offering in-person or virtual supplemental academic support; and maintaining mentorship relationships with youth experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian, in particular.

Key Considerations for Reopening

Have plans in place to respond to increased trauma caused by extended shelter-in-place orders in unsafe living situations and increased economic stress.

- Screen for trauma when school restarts, either in person or online.
  - [DPI Mental/Behavioral Health Screening webpage](#)

- Invite community mental health providers to support students virtually and/or on-site at schools.

Key Considerations for Reopening

Ensure that community collaborations robust, so families and students can receive additional services that support educational success.

- Connect with community agencies providing food, health care, mental health care, shelter, and housing to families or youth, to find out what is available and how your students and families can access it.
- In rural areas in particular, connect with faith communities, civic organizations, and youth groups that might be able to share McKinney-Vento information with families and offer support or funding for basic needs and distance learning equipment.

Key Considerations for Reopening

What questions can help identify students and families experiencing homelessness in the COVID-19 context?

- Have you had an eviction deferred, and when will the eviction moratorium end?

- Have you had rent or utility payments deferred, and when will those payments resume?

- Have you had steady income?

- Do you have a working stove and refrigerator?

- How long have you been where you are staying currently, and how long do you think you will be able to stay there?

- DPI EHCY [Sample Questions for Information Gathering](#)

Resources

- [DPI EHCY Website](#)

- DPI EHCY Google Spreadsheet: [Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness During COVID-19 Closures](#)

- [DPI Information on COVID-19 Website](#)

- SchoolHouse Connection: [Preparing for School Reopening and Recovery: Considerations in Serving Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#)

- SchoolHouse Connection: [Removing Barriers to Online Enrollment for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)

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