



National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children
and Youth Experiencing Homelessness
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Partnering with School Social Workers to Expand Local Homeless Liaison Capacity and Provide Wraparound Services under the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth Program

A Brief for Local Liaisons, School Social Workers, and School Administrators

This NCHE brief

- summarizes the role and expertise of school social workers;
- describes ways that school social workers can build local homeless liaisons' capacity to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness; and
- includes strategies for and examples of successful partnerships between school social workers and local liaisons, as well as between school social workers and community-based organizations.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021

In response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth experiencing homelessness, Congress allocated \$800 million under section 2001(b)(1) of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP)¹ to support the immediate needs of these students. The ARP Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds were disbursed to state educational agencies (SEAs) to enable children and youth experiencing homelessness,² who were in many cases disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, to attend school and participate fully in school activities.

¹ View the full statute of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021: <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr1319/BILLS-117hr1319enr.pdf>. For additional information on the ARP-HCY program, view the ED ARP-HCY program web page: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-homeless-children-youth-arp-hcy/>. Also, view the ARP-HCY resources page of the National Center for Homeless Education: <https://nche.ed.gov/legislation/arp/>.

² For the definition of homeless in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, visit the NCHE website: <https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition/>; also review the NCHE brief *Determining Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights and Services*: https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/det_elig.pdf.

ARP-HCY funds were to be used for the same purposes established by Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (reauthorized in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. § 11431 *et seq.*) and hereafter referred to as the McKinney-Vento Act),³ but the funds were also intended to provide wraparound services for children and youth experiencing homelessness (Cardona, 2021). While not defined in the ARP, *wraparound services* is a term originally used in the fields of behavioral or mental health and commonly used to mean a child- or youth-centered approach to providing services in a comprehensive and holistic way by a team made up of professionals working in partnership with supportive people in the child's life, such as parents, friends, and relatives (VanDenBurg, Bruns, & Burchard, 2008). Wraparound services can include services to address the academic, social, emotional, medical, and mental health needs of individuals.

³ For more information on the McKinney-Vento Act, view the following NCHE web page: <https://nche.ed.gov/legislation/mckinney-vento/>; review "Local educational agency subgrants for the education of homeless children and youths" in the McKinney-Vento Act for the purposes and allowable uses of subgrant funds (42 U.S.C. § 11433).

The ARP-HCY program focuses on increasing SEAs' and local educational agencies' (LEAs) capacity to provide wraparound services by hiring staff, dedicating resources, and planning partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs). After ARP-HCY funds were disbursed in summer of 2021, many LEAs greatly expanded their student support services staff and pupil services staff to provide additional services. These staff members include school counselors,⁴ school social workers, and other student support services personnel.⁵ These staff groups each have specific roles and responsibilities, but their duties can overlap, and they often work in partnership to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness. For example, school counselors may focus on college preparation and career counseling for students experiencing homelessness, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act (42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g) (1)(K)), but school counselors also provide other supports to students experiencing homelessness similar to those provided by school social workers such as providing mental health services, academic support and guidance, and connecting students to community services.

This brief will focus specifically on the unique role and expertise of school social workers in serving children and youth experiencing homelessness and offers ways that school social workers can provide wraparound services and work with CBOs.

The Role of School Social Workers in Providing Wraparound Services to Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness

School social workers are specially trained, licensed professionals hired by schools and LEAs to enhance educators' abilities to help all students succeed by fostering collaboration across school, home, and community contexts (School Social Workers Association of America, n.d.). The typical role of the school social worker includes tasks that are critical for supporting students experiencing homelessness,

⁴ For more information on how school counselors serve children and youth experiencing homelessness, view the NCHE brief *School Counselor Supports for College Preparation and Readiness for Students Experiencing Homelessness*: <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/counselor-brief.pdf>. Also, view the position statement from the American School Counselor Association on serving students experiencing homelessness: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/Standards-Positions/Position-Statements/ASCA-Position-Statements/The-School-Counselor-and-Children-Experiencing-Hom>.

⁵ For information on school personnel resources for students experiencing homelessness, view the following NCHE web page: <https://nche.ed.gov/personnel-resources/>.

such as the following (Kelly, 2020; School Social Workers Association of America, n.d.):

- providing counseling and other mental health services to students;
- providing crisis intervention and conflict resolution services;
- identifying students in need of intensive interventions and connecting these students to additional services;
- promoting a school climate and culture conducive to learning for all students; and
- assisting parents and families in accessing and utilizing school and community resources.

School social workers are well-positioned to serve as school-level points of contact for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every LEA must designate a local homeless education liaison, also referred to as the local liaison (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)). Local liaisons are charged with ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified and served by school personnel, including through coordination with other entities and agencies as needed (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(i)).⁶ Many LEAs and schools also assign a school-level point of contact to assist with identifying and serving eligible students. School social workers, as well as school counselors and assistant principals, often serve as the school-level point of contact.

Given their focus on providing students and families with a variety of services, school social workers are natural partners to help local liaisons and school-level points of contact identify and provide students experiencing homelessness with wraparound services. School social workers can add capacity to the existing team to expand and tailor wraparound services in numerous ways, such as:

- starting a school food pantry, clothing closet, or hygiene storeroom;
- repurposing school areas and outfitting them with small kitchen appliances and laundry facilities; or
- connecting students to tutoring and extended learning programs.

School social workers are uniquely trained to engage and build relationships with CBOs and therefore can assist with building community awareness and making referrals to services in the community.

⁶ For more information on the role of the local homeless liaison, view the NCHE brief *Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Understanding Their Role*: <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/liaisons.pdf>.

The Resolution Statement from the School Social Workers Association of America notes, “School social workers are trained in understanding family and community systems and linking students and their families with community services essential to provide student success” (Kelly, 2020, p. 1). Through collaborative efforts with CBOs, school social workers support integrated service delivery for students experiencing homelessness (Battle, 2022). Examples of collaboration between school social workers and CBOs include:

- making referrals for services to provide food, housing, emergency assistance, furniture, healthcare, and mental and behavioral health support;
- forming connections with community agencies to identify and connect homeless students to services; and
- conducting awareness campaigns to familiarize families and organizations with services available for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Strategies for Building Partnerships

As local liaisons and school social workers build their partnerships, they can provide wraparound services to students experiencing homelessness effectively and efficiently. LEAs and schools should take the following actions:

- Build capacity to work together.
 - ◊ Train school social workers or other designated school-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness on the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act for student identification, eligibility determinations, program enrollment, and the provision of support services.
 - ◊ Ensure the local liaison, school social workers, or other school-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness build relationships with service providers and CBOs together. Invite all partners to participate in introductory meetings and planning sessions to identify how each can contribute to ongoing collective efforts. Consistently including all partners allows them to be fully informed and bring their expertise and staff capacity to meeting the needs of individual students being served.
- Establish shared processes to guide the work.
 - ◊ Establish a referral process that enables the liaison, school social workers, or other

designated school-level points of contact to interact with CBOs and other service providers in a consistent manner. This could include clear referral requirements and easily accessible information about CBOs and other service providers, such as contact information and resources offered.

- ◊ Designate the local liaison, school social workers, or other school-level points of contact as responsible for facilitating regular communication between the LEA and service providers or CBOs. This can ensure timely referrals, information sharing, and service coordination.
- ◊ Develop formal interagency agreements with service providers and CBOs that establish shared protocols for referrals, communication, data use, and confidentiality.
- Identify needs and regularly track the progress of the students being served to ensure all those involved understand and effectively address student needs.
 - ◊ Arrange regular case conferences that include the local liaison, school social workers or other designated school-level points of contact, and providers of wraparound services, including CBOs. Case conferences enable partners to collaboratively review the status of students referred for services and determine next steps to ensure that each student receives the breadth and intensity of supports they need to succeed.
 - ◊ Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment for students experiencing homelessness that includes the liaison; school social workers or other school-level points of contact; providers of wraparound services, including CBOs; and other LEA stakeholders.⁷ Conduct the needs assessment annually or as often as needed.
 - ◊ Reassess partnerships periodically. Surveys or questionnaires are useful tools for this effort, followed by collaborative conversations to allow all involved to adjust their efforts based on continuous, shared learning.⁸

⁷ For additional information on conducting a comprehensive needs assessment visit: <https://nche.ed.gov/needs-assessment>.

⁸ For briefs and other resources on LEA and community collaborations to serve children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, visit the following NCHE web page: <https://nche.ed.gov/collaboration/>.

LEA Spotlights

LEAs across the nation are enhancing their partnerships between their Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program and school social workers with ARP-HCY funds to provide wraparound services more effectively to students experiencing homelessness. Some LEAs have developed successful short-term partnerships that will be sustainable beyond the availability of this unprecedented funding. The following spotlights exemplify how two LEAs have effectively leveraged ARP-HCY funds to support school social workers.

Taos Municipal Schools (NM): Taos Municipal Schools is using ARP-HCY funds and Medicaid to engage the services of Taos Behavioral Health to provide additional wraparound services to students experiencing homelessness and their families, serving roughly 100 individuals in this LEA. The Title I school social worker, crisis interventionist, and local liaison with Taos Municipal Schools are working with other school personnel to identify students experiencing homelessness. After identification, the team completes a student needs assessment and action plan to refer students to wraparound services. Taos Behavioral Health provides students and families services that address intergenerational patterns of poverty and homelessness. These services include group and individual therapy, tutoring, transportation to appointments, assistance with accessing vital records, and social and emotional learning supports. Services to students and families are available during the school year and the summer. Taos Municipal Schools is also using ARP-HCY funds to partner with other organizations to support employment resources, housing, and food delivery to eligible students and families.

Kannapolis City Schools (NC): In this suburban LEA, the local liaison and a school district-level McKinney-Vento Act social worker partner with school social workers to support students and families experiencing homelessness. School social workers at each school initiate referrals for students experiencing homelessness by contacting the McKinney-Vento district-level social worker. The district-level social worker serves as the immediate response contact who arranges district transportation, submits mileage reimbursement for parents to provide school of origin transportation, arranges mental health referrals, and coordinates an expanded tutoring program that offers school-based and virtual instructional support. The McKinney-Vento district-level social worker also coordinates support from faith-based agencies, which meet quarterly and assist families with home repairs,

utilities, gas cards, mentors, clothes and new shoes for students, and store gift cards. This LEA also partners with the local health alliance to cover medical expenses while families await Medicaid coverage.

In Kannapolis City Schools, school social workers serve as the school-level point of contact for students experiencing homelessness and are responsible for wraparound referrals. School counselors can contact the school social workers or the McKinney-Vento district-level social worker to refer students to appropriate wraparound service providers. To increase the local liaison's capacity and support the work of the McKinney-Vento district-level social worker, the LEA will utilize ARP-HCY funds to create a hybrid school social worker and EHCY position at the school district level to sustain the work of providing wraparound services for students experiencing homelessness. The staff worker in this hybrid position will spend the majority of their time assisting with wraparound services and other supports needed for students experiencing homelessness and will spend remaining time as a regular school social worker who supports all students.

Conclusion

The availability of ARP-HCY funds to address the challenges of COVID-19 has greatly expanded SEA and LEA program capacity to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and provide them with wraparound services. By fostering collaborations between local homeless liaisons and school social workers that can extend beyond the lifecycle of the ARP-HCY program, this funding has the potential to create lasting changes in how public schools respond to the academic, social and emotional, and mental health needs of these students. School social workers play a vital role in assisting students, families, and student support staff, and are trained to engage with the broader community to support student needs. In addition, school social workers and local liaisons are natural partners in eliminating barriers that affect students' success in school. Together, this partnership maximizes opportunities for sustainable collaboration with CBOs in providing wraparound services for students experiencing homelessness.

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For more information on issues related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org.

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