



United Way of  
Massachusetts Bay



**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
School of Social Work



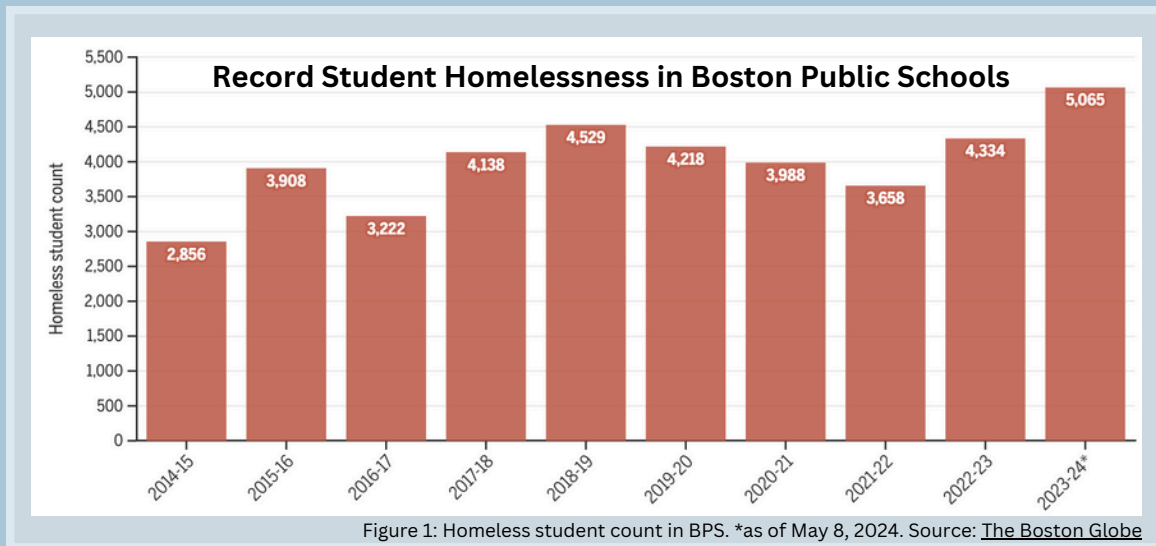
# *Supporting Student Housing Stability in Massachusetts:* **A Policy Guide**

*This brief seeks to improve staff effectiveness while maximizing and streamlining support for students and families experiencing homelessness, ensuring they receive the assistance they need and deserve. The guidance is intended for, but not limited to, Massachusetts policymakers and Boston Public Schools (BPS) administrators, offering key insights and actionable guidance. It includes best practices, case studies, and targeted recommendations, with appendices for further reference. The content focuses on making existing resources more accessible by improving coordination and implementing best practices to enhance the well-being of staff, students, and families.*



# Introduction

In 2022-23, more than 25,000 students across Massachusetts experienced homelessness, an increase of over 2,000 students from the start of the decade. In Boston Public Schools (BPS), the number of students experiencing homelessness is at an all-time high. BPS recorded more than 10 percent of the district's population—over 5,000 students—experienced homelessness in the 2023-24 school year. This record number follows a rising trend since 2021-22.



Supporting students experiencing homelessness is part of [BPS's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan](#) goals. The goals pertinent to homelessness include but are not limited to, developing capacity to address health and social contributors to opportunity gaps, enhancing transparent data-sharing mechanisms, and reducing chronic absenteeism.

In each school, BPS has a designated local homeless education liaison, as required by the McKinney-Vento Act. This individual plays a critical role in identifying students experiencing homelessness, ensuring their enrollment in school, and facilitating their access to all eligible services. Further, administrators play a vital role in allocating resources and setting priorities to support students facing homelessness, such as coordinating services and adopting low-barrier strategies to improve staff, student, and family well-being.

As BPS has ensured that there is designated staff in every school to support homeless students, these liaisons are now insightfully communicating what is needed to improve the system's effectiveness. Through a workshop series, BPS homeless liaisons shared the need for streamlined communication, improved resource allocation, and a wider understanding of the challenges they may face. The following quotes represent key themes raised in these workshops (see Appendix B for more):

*"There need to be better, **more accessible resources** in the housing services sector and much easier connection to those resources."*

*"[Administrators should know] that **funds are ABSOLUTELY necessary** to help and support families."*

*"[We need] **support for liaisons to feel less overwhelmed** and more connected to beneficial techniques and resources."*

# Best Practices

Based on feedback shared by liaisons, the following section serves to outline and consolidate research-backed best practices to support students experiencing homelessness. **Leaders in BPS have committed to establishing a robust foundation for these best practices, as outlined in the Boston Public Schools 20/25 Strategic Plan and HERN Strategic Implementation Plan.** It is crucial that these best practices are maintained and further developed to optimally support homeless liaisons across the district.

## 1 Create a supportive school environment by training school staff to support students experiencing homelessness, understand their unique challenges, and foster awareness of their rights.

- School leaders can facilitate staff training by:
  - Sharing [Know Your Rights resources](#) to empower educators to address students' concerns.
  - Distributing [tip sheets](#) for school personnel to support students experiencing homelessness.
  - Referencing BPS Superintendent [guidelines and procedures](#).
  - Utilizing HERN [training, professional development, and workshops](#) for BPS staff.
  - Encouraging school staff to [research the prevalence and trends](#) of homelessness in their communities so they are more prepared to meet the needs of their students.
- School leaders can prioritize and equip liaisons with low-barrier practices to enhance stress-reduction and healing among students, such as nature walks, art, mindfulness, etc.



## 2 Implement trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices to create a supportive environment for students experiencing homelessness.

- [Trauma-informed practices](#) such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), positive interpersonal relationships, evidence-based discipline models, and school-based mental health support [can improve the education and well-being of students facing homelessness](#).
- [Culturally relevant pedagogy \(CRP\)](#) can help create a supportive school environment where students and families feel more comfortable self-identifying as experiencing homelessness.
- Access to [resources](#) outlining best practices for teachers to communicate with students experiencing homelessness can foster a supportive school climate and encourage self-identification.



# Best Practices

## 3 Collect data that is specifically responsive to students facing homelessness and contribute to data sharing between schools and community partners.

- Implementing an early warning system that tracks attendance and other indicators can help proactively identify students experiencing homelessness. For example, by tracking chronic absenteeism data, [Washoe County School District](#) improved attendance and graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness.
- Research shows that cross-sector collaboration between schools, homeless shelters, and other human services agencies is particularly important in addressing student homelessness. [Sharing data](#) between these entities can help improve identification and services for students. While BPS shares data with FamilyAid, there could be room for additional partnerships.



## 4 Engage families and students to maximize support systems.



- Proactively providing opportunities for families to update housing forms during regularly scheduled events may help identify students and provide support.
- [Research](#) shows that positive relationships with teachers and peers were crucial sources of support for high school students experiencing homelessness. Ensuring regular communication with student-identified trusted adults is important for schools to tailor services to students' needs and improve outcomes.





# Case Studies

BPS has become a leader in cultivating partnerships to support students experiencing homelessness. While BPS has made significant strides to build on these best practices, there is room to develop and further grow these initiatives to ensure continued alignment with best practices. The following section describes existing initiatives while exemplifying additional corresponding case studies for further learning.

## Multi-State Study by the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) examined five school districts that provide high-quality services to homeless students: Browning Public Schools (*Montana*), Cincinnati Public Schools (*Ohio*), Polk County Public Schools (*Florida*), Santa Fe Public Schools (*New Mexico*), and Spokane Public Schools (*Washington*).

The districts utilized the following high-impact strategies to support homeless students:

- Employed **strategies to identify students experiencing homelessness**. The districts conducted public information campaigns, educated staff on servicing vulnerable populations, and used district or school programs (e.g., food pantries) to connect families at risk of homelessness.
- Provided essential services to homeless students by **coordinating services provided by the schools, district, and community-based organizations (CBOs)**. Services included providing essential items (e.g., clothing, food, hygiene products), transportation to school and extracurricular activities, academic services, physical and mental health supports, specialized support for unaccompanied youth (e.g., prepaid cell phones) and support for families (e.g., childcare, counseling).
- Applied for McKinney-Vento **grants to fund staffing for homeless programs**, including roles such as homeless liaisons, grant writers, transportation coordinators, counselors, and shelter-based coordinators.
- **Secured funds** and resources through public and private sources, including from nonprofit organizations, philanthropies, and community donations, in response to inadequate state and federal funding.

## BPS Initiatives

### Early Homelessness Intervention Program with FamilyAid

This initiative aims to prevent homelessness by providing BPS families that are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness with case management, wraparound supports, and financial assistance. The program has helped over 1,400 families since 2019.

### Boston Housing Authority Voucher Partnership

Boston Public Schools have assisted over 1,600 families in finding housing since 2021 through a strong partnership with the Boston Housing Authority, who has aided in providing housing vouchers to families across the district.

### BPS & Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Data Sharing Agreement

BPS and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) launched a pilot initiative in 2016 to track and share data on students experiencing homelessness. This partnership, supported by a mutual data sharing agreement, aims to enhance student support and success by monitoring key metrics like attendance and academic performance, and involves collaboration with Project Hope to identify early warning indicators and provide targeted assistance.

# Recommendations

Informed by feedback from liaisons during discussion sessions, research into best practices, and an analysis of the BPS strategic plan for alignment, the following section offers recommendations for school administrators and policymakers to further support students experiencing homelessness.

## Strengthen communication systems.

BPS homeless liaisons expressed the need for more efficient communication systems to improve their capacity to serve families experiencing homelessness. They suggested creating a flowchart that would provide referral pathways liaisons should follow when they identify families with different types of housing needs (e.g., newly arrived migrants or families at-risk but not currently homeless). They also suggested developing an updated information system to share resources with families. These improved systems provided by a centralized actor, such as HERN, could improve referral processes and information sharing, facilitating more efficient identification of and support for students experiencing homelessness.



### BPS Strategic Plan Goal Connection

**1.8:** *Develop capacity to address health and social contributors to opportunity gaps, such as hunger, chronic illness, mental health, sexual health, homelessness, and LGBTQ+ identity.*

## Increase awareness and accessibility of services for families and students facing homelessness.



### BPS Strategic Plan Goal Connection

**3.7:** *Engage families and community to understand needs and engage in shared decision making through texts, online, surveys, and calls.*

With updated and easy-to-find information, families and students experiencing homelessness can more easily access available services. Right now, homeless liaisons report that information is often scattered, outdated, or difficult to locate in a time of need. To address this, BPS could offer expanded resources, beyond the existing [HERN Toolkit](#), in an accessible format and in multiple languages, allowing homeless liaisons to easily distribute updated resources to families. Resources could include [pooled information](#) about local events and policies (e.g., a clothing drive event, changes to housing policies) to share information with families.

## Allocate resources effectively to address students' specific needs.

[Case studies](#) show that districts that allocated funds, for example through Title I, specifically to support students facing homelessness were better able to address their needs. To reduce stigma, districts can make resources available to all students who would benefit from them, even if they haven't been identified as homeless. Considering that BPS homeless liaisons voiced the need for expanded resources, targeting funding allocation and expanded accessibility may improve resource availability and reach more students. Further, school administrators can prioritize allocating existing resources effectively by streamlining and coordinating resource distribution. To begin addressing this issue, BPS published a [guide](#) to leverage funding for students experiencing homelessness.



### BPS Strategic Plan Goal Connection

**4.1:** *Fund all schools in a manner that meets the unique needs of the students they serve.*

# Recommendations

## Enhance inter-agency collaboration to provide comprehensive support services.

Drawing on input from homeless liaisons and best practices, effective support for students experiencing homelessness requires inter-agency collaboration. While BPS has partnered with FamilyAid to connect families with preventative homelessness resources and the Boston Housing Authority to issue housing vouchers to BPS families experiencing homelessness, administrators report there is a lack of voucher availability. To address this challenge, BPS needs to facilitate high-level coordination to advocate for and administer vouchers and other available resources so that they can be distributed effectively.

### BPS Strategic Plan Goal Connection

**6.3:** *Coordinate partner organizations with school personnel to enrich learning and services during the school day including student support.*

Further, school districts could facilitate additional partnerships such as:

- Collaborating with local partners to support students access to transportation (e.g., faith-based organizations or community organizations)
- Partnering with local businesses to provide services to students. For example, Sullivan Middle School in Lowell, MA partnered with a local barbershop to provide free in-school haircuts for all students.
- Tracking and sharing current and historical data such as homeless-risk indicators with key partners can help proactively identify and support students experiencing homelessness. Consolidating historical data to identify and support students across different schools and sharing this information between schools can help support students who are frequently absent or change schools often, as is common among students experiencing homelessness.

While BPS offers a partnerships database, homeless liaisons shared a need for improved partnerships, indicating that this existing resource could be more widely promoted to maximize its utilization.

Considering that homelessness is multifaceted, community partnerships are crucial to ensuring that families experiencing homelessness receive the support they need. The Rennie Center's "**Supporting Unhoused Students: A Blueprint for Massachusetts Schools**" is a helpful guide on how to create and maintain strong school-community partnerships.

The blueprint outlines four steps that districts can take to design and implement a community-driven program:

1. **Prepare:** Build school/community capacity and buy-in and cultivate partnerships.
2. **Design:** Identify students and families experiencing homelessness and their needs, and determine a mechanism to track services and referrals.
3. **Implement:** Create a schedule that outlines how various stakeholders will work together.
4. **Evolve:** Monitor and evaluate the impact of the program, including tracking measures such as housing and school stability, academic achievement, student behavior, and stakeholder satisfaction.





# Conclusion

The issue of student homelessness is urgent and needs immediate attention. The increase in student homelessness across Massachusetts is alarming and poses significant challenges, impacting graduation rates, health, test scores, absenteeism, and mobility—highlighting the clear need for targeted interventions. While there is more work to be done, BPS has made strides in addressing student homelessness.

BPS's initiatives, including efforts by the Department of Opportunity Youth and the Homeless Education Resource Network (HERN), have been critical in safeguarding the educational rights of children experiencing homelessness. These programs, along with recent partnerships aimed at increasing affordable housing and shelter availability, have positioned BPS on the right track toward mitigating the impact of homelessness on students.

However, more needs to be done. Recent workshops with BPS homeless liaisons have highlighted ongoing needs, such as expanding affordable housing, increasing shelter availability, enhancing social-emotional learning support, ensuring housing is located closer to schools, and updating resources for low-income families. The workshops also stressed the importance of trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches.

To build on this progress, school administrators and policymakers should focus on strengthening the role of homeless liaisons, improving collaboration between agencies, tracking data on homelessness, and raising awareness of available services. Examining case studies from other districts, such as launching public information campaigns and coordinating services across agencies, can provide valuable insights.

While BPS has made significant headway in supporting homeless students, there is still a long way to go. Effectively addressing student homelessness requires a collaborative, data-driven approach with targeted resources. By adopting these recommendations, administrators and policymakers can continue to enhance support for students experiencing homelessness, helping them achieve better outcomes in school and in life.





# Acknowledgments

The research for this guide was conducted by the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. This material emerged from a series of workshops with Boston Public Schools homeless liaisons hosted by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay in spring 2024.



United Way of  
Massachusetts Bay

This three-part series consisted of sessions covering:

- Trauma, Healing, and Systems Coordination
- Input on Research to Advance Identification of Families
- Liaison Feedback and Introduction to Rennie Center Resources

The production of this brief was guided by BPS liaisons' insights, and featured quotes were collected directly from liaisons during the series. We are thankful for all who participated and generously shared their time and experiences.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

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## ABOUT THE RENNIE CENTER

The mission of the [Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy](#) is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. As Massachusetts' preeminent voice in public education reform, we create open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. Through our staunch commitment to independent, non-partisan research and constructive conversations, we work to promote an education system that provides every child with the opportunity to be successful in school and in life.



# Research Practice Partnership

## Linking Research and Practice to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

In 2019, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and the Boston College School of Social Work (PI: Gautam N. Yadama) established a research-practice partnership, aiming to:

1. Improve the quality of research on the impact of early homelessness prevention on educational outcomes;
2. Equip service providers, schools, administrators, and policymakers with research evidence;
3. Facilitate provider and school use of research evidence; and
4. Ultimately improve child well-being and reduce educational inequity.



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This partnership is evaluating the impact of the Early Homelessness Prevention Program, a partnership of Boston Public Schools and FamilyAid. It is funded through an Institutional Challenge Grant from the WT Grant Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, with critical support coming directly from liaisons. As part of the process, researchers engaged 50 Boston Public Schools liaisons in a series of three discussion sessions on the challenges and opportunities of their roles. This phase of work took place during the spring of 2024, offering insights into how liaisons support school communities and families experiencing homelessness. The Daily Practice Resource Guide and this Policy Guide intend to document what homeless liaisons shared about their role for a broader audience of practitioners and policymakers.

*To learn more about this partnership, please contact Sarah Bartley ([sarahbartley@supportunitedway.org](mailto:sarahbartley@supportunitedway.org)).*





# Appendix A:

## *Data on Students Experiencing Homelessness in BPS*

In Boston Public Schools (BPS), the number of students experiencing homelessness is at an all-time high. More than 10 percent of the BPS population—over 5,000 students—experienced homelessness in the 2023-24 school year. This record number follows a rising trend since 2021-22. The increase in housing prices, end of eviction moratoriums, influx of migrants, and reduction in housing subsidies are likely contributing factors.

Childhood homelessness has a significant impact on student outcomes. For example:

- Test scores in reading, math, and science tend to be lower for students experiencing homelessness. In BPS, students experiencing homelessness score an average scaled score of 482 on the Grade 10 ELA MCAS exam compared to an average scaled score of 497 for all students.
- Students experiencing homelessness are 18% less likely to graduate high school than their stably housed peers.
- Homelessness is linked with poor physical health, including chronic conditions such as asthma, which impact student attendance and achievement.
- Students experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of mental health issues such as suicide, depression, and anxiety.

Further, students experiencing homeless are more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism and switch schools more often. In BPS, average attendance for students experiencing homelessness is 3.5% lower than the district average.

Nationally and in BPS, students experiencing homelessness are disproportionately likely to be students of color. In 2019-20, Hispanic students accounted for 28% of the US student body and 38% of students experiencing homelessness, while Black students made up 15% of the student body and represented 27% of students experiencing homelessness. In BPS, 85% of all students are students of color, but 95% of students experiencing homelessness are students of color. Compared to all students, BPS students with IEP's (23%) and English Learners (42%) also experience homelessness at higher rates.





# Appendix B:

## Homeless Liaison Survey Response Data

The following table includes a summary of responses from attendees at the final workshop hosted in May 2024. The themes were created to summarize and organize participant responses.

| Question:   | Participant Response:   | Themes:   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>What do you want district administrators, school administrators, and community partners to know about your role?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “That we support homeless families but don’t (currently) have any real guaranteed access to housing/shelters.”</li> <li>• “That we do not have funds available to assist families with housing issues.”</li> <li>• “That funds are ABSOLUTELY necessary to help and support families.”</li> <li>• “We do not have a say in whether or not families get into shelters or receive housing vouchers.”</li> <li>• “This job takes more time than they believe.”</li> <li>• “That we are expected to resolve a lot of housing issues but we do not have any more access to housing pathways than the families themselves.”</li> <li>• “That the waiting list for shelter has eliminated shelter as a viable option for families experiencing homelessness.”</li> <li>• “We have to pretend our roles are MORE important when calling on behalf of families. I often say I am the Family Advocate.”</li> <li>• “We are limited in being involved after we make the connection and families rely on us not the person entity we connected them to.”</li> <li>• “This is a full-time job. We have to stay up to date with the current resources which is constantly changing while still doing our main job.”</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaison role has limited capacity:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Liaisons don’t have a say in who gets access to shelters or housing vouchers and</li> <li>◦ Not enough understanding about the demands of the job</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Insufficient funding:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Not enough funds to assist families with housing insecurity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resources can be disparate and insufficient               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Liaisons need to stay updated on resources but they are constantly changing</li> <li>◦ Limited involvement after Liaisons make the connection between families and the housing entity</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p>In an ideal world, how would you partner with BPS administrators and community partners?</p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I would like to welcome partners and community leaders to a roundtable with families to hear testimony and talked about real solutions.”</li> </ul>   |   |
| <p>What challenges affecting your role are most important for BPS administrators or policy leaders to address?</p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Lack of available resources like shelters.”</li> <li>• “No guarantee of placement near school when families are placed in shelter.”</li> <li>• “Creating options for families without status.”</li> <li>• “Many new high rises coming up in local neighborhoods and communities of color should be required have X amount of low income and no income families.”</li> <li>• “Lack of up to date resources. Affordable housing in Boston.”</li> <li>• “Lack of affordable rental opportunities.”</li> <li>• “SEL support is needed outside of school in shelters- boys group, girls group, etc.”</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for affordable housing for low-income families</li> <li>• Need more shelters and resources               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ SEL support</li> <li>◦ Prioritizing housing families near their children’s school</li> <li>◦ Need for up-to-date resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |

# Appendix B:

## Homeless Liaison Survey Response Data

The following table includes a summary of responses from attendees at the second workshop in April 2024. The themes were created to summarize and organize participant responses.

| Question:   | Participant Response:   | Themes:   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>What other BPS-based strategies could improve homeless liaison capacity to identify students experiencing housing instability or homelessness?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Discuss other ways to define homelessness so that families feel comfortable self-identifying and accessing relevant resources.”</li> <li>• “Upstream connections to resources and support from non-BPS social workers, etc. so that homeless liaisons don’t become the last resort for unhoused families.”</li> <li>• “Clarity on what being a homeless liaison entails and what is expected from the role, and what resources are available to us. Training for all liaisons could be very helpful.”</li> <li>• “Support for liaisons to feel less overwhelmed and more connected to beneficial techniques and resources.”</li> <li>• “Develop additional partnerships with other organizations to connect families with case workers/case managers.”</li> <li>• “flow chart.”</li> <li>• “Flow chart.”</li> <li>• “Start of year Q&amp;A with social workers and admin discussing possible supports and understanding/empathy of social challenges and school sensitivity towards them.”</li> <li>• “Funding to help w/moving cost etc.”</li> <li>• “A checklist that can be handed to families after they meet with the homeless liaison about the different applications/programs they completed for a contact person for each.”</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaisons need more support               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Clearer job expectations</li> <li>◦ More training opportunities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Need for improved communication systems with families               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Need for a flow chart to use with referrals</li> <li>◦ Need for a checklist for families to clarify resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clearer expectations with stakeholders               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Q&amp;A with liaisons and admin</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                |
| <p>If we could develop resources and information that families can easily access, what should be included?</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Transportation help for students with housing instability who are not in shelter so they can stay at the same school."</li> <li>• "Hire more staff to support with the transportation process."</li> <li>• "Transportation alternatives (uber and voucher) and emergency housing."</li> <li>• "Definitions of homelessness."</li> <li>• "There need to be better, more accessible resources in the housing services sector and much easier connection to those resources."</li> <li>• "Organizations that provide rent relief."</li> <li>• "Brokers/agents that can help families find a room or apartment to rent."</li> <li>• "I think when you put together these resources, it would be nice to put a symbol to let families know if they need a social or if a family member needs one to apply."</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Students need access to transportation to get to/from school</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Resources               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Need for more accessible resources about access to housing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Improved communication               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ A need for more accessible communication with families about social security numbers and other requirements</li> <li>◦ Improved or more accurate definitions of homelessness</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

# Appendix C:

## *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in BPS Overview*

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, initially enacted in 1987 and most recently reauthorized in December 2015 through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), serves as pivotal legislation aimed at ensuring educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness. This act mandates that local educational agencies (LEAs) identify children experiencing or at risk of homelessness and connect them with necessary educational and supportive services.

**Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every school district is required to designate a staff member as the local homeless education liaison.** This individual plays a critical role in identifying homeless students in their district, ensuring their enrollment in school, and facilitating their access to all eligible services. These services encompass a broad range of support, including academic assistance, food, transportation, and guidance. The liaison also collaborates with parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth to provide comprehensive, trauma-informed assistance.

A liaison's responsibilities are extensive. They must ensure that students experiencing homelessness are identified and enrolled in school without delay. They must also determine eligibility for various supports, assist with school selection, and secure access to necessary services. Additionally, they play a crucial role in raising awareness about homelessness within the school and community and working closely with unaccompanied youth to address their unique challenges.

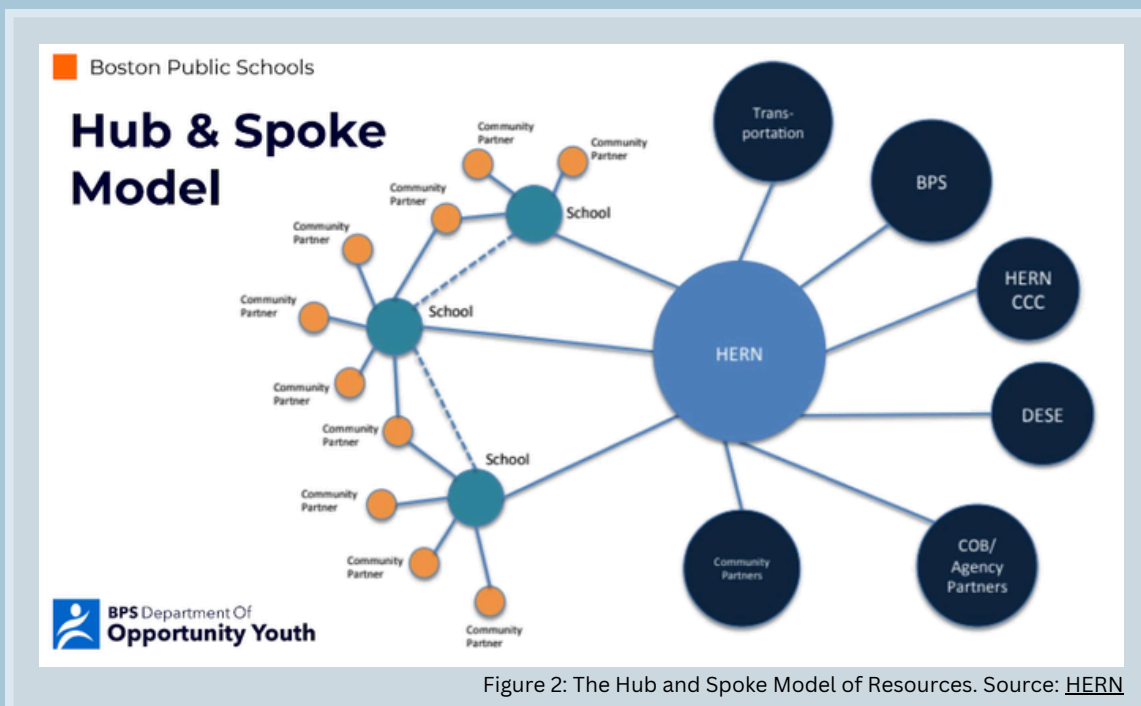


Figure 2: The Hub and Spoke Model of Resources. Source: [HERN](#)



# Appendix C:

## *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in BPS Overview*

In the context of Boston Public Schools (BPS), the Department of Opportunity Youth coordinates the district's response to students and families experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Within this department, the [Homeless Education Resource Network \(HERN\)](#) brings together resources, knowledge, and partnerships to address the multifaceted challenges associated with homelessness. HERN works diligently to mitigate the barriers to student success that homelessness presents, ensuring that students have the necessary support to thrive academically despite their housing instability.

The definition of "homeless" under the [McKinney-Vento Act](#) is broad. It encompasses individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes children and youth who are sharing a residence due to loss of housing or economic hardship (known as "doubled-up" situations); those living in hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds; and those residing in emergency or transitional shelters. It also covers children and youth living in public or private places not meant for regular sleeping accommodations, such as cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, and substandard housing. Migratory children living in these conditions also qualify as homeless.

Overall, the McKinney-Vento Act is a crucial piece of legislation that aims to remove educational barriers for homeless youth, ensuring they have the resources necessary to succeed academically. Through dedicated liaisons and supportive networks like BPS's HERN, the act strives to provide stability and opportunity for some of our most vulnerable students.

