



SchoolHouse  
Connection



# **OVERLOOKED AND ALMOST OUT OF TIME**

**Pandemic-Era Funds for Children and  
Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

February 2024

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# Executive Summary

At a time of increasing and unprecedented homelessness – with more children and youth living without safe, stable housing than during the pandemic – schools are running out of time to use federal pandemic-era funds dedicated to helping homeless students.

This report presents key findings from a national survey of school district homeless liaisons about the impact of and challenges using American Rescue Plan – Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds. It finds that:

**Child and youth homelessness has increased since the pandemic, creating a greater need for targeted support for students experiencing homelessness.**

- The number of families in homeless shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 16% in 2023, while the number of unaccompanied youth in homeless shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 15%. Nearly half of school district homeless liaisons reported higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness, while less than a tenth reported a decrease.

**ARP-HCY funds have proven to be impactful in schools across the nation.**

- The number of school districts receiving dedicated funding to support students experiencing homelessness has more than doubled as a result of ARP-HCY funding, reaching over half of all school districts.
- Schools are taking advantage of the unique flexibility of ARP-HCY funds to meet a wide variety of urgent needs in ways that were not previously allowable with other federal funding sources.
- School district homeless liaisons report many positive impacts of ARP-HCY funds, including increased school stability, identification, and attendance. Liaisons who reported they received ARP-HCY funds were nearly twice as likely to report an increase in student homelessness due in part to better outreach and more staffing capacity.

**Despite these positive impacts, a number of challenges are preventing ARP-HCY funds from helping vulnerable students at a time of heightened need.**

- One-quarter of school district homeless liaisons surveyed indicated that they may not be able to obligate all of their ARP-HCY funds by the September 2024 deadline due to a limited amount of time and/or administrative hurdles. An additional 25% of liaisons were unaware their district received ARP-HCY funds, potentially making it difficult to meet spending deadlines. This is also a sign of a greater disconnect between school district homeless liaisons and local educational leadership.
- Staff turnover and lack of capacity also emerged as challenges across survey responses. At the state level, there was a nearly 50% turnover rate in the position of State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth from April 2021 to January 2024.

- Even though liaisons are legally responsible for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness, they are often excluded from key decisions about use of funding. Of school district homeless liaisons who indicated that they may not be able to use all of their funds to help homeless students by the September 2024 deadline, 25% stated that not being a part of funding decisions in the LEA was a contributing factor.
- Many school district homeless liaisons are unsure if or how they will sustain services or programming funded by ARP-HCY; the majority will look to some form of limited federal funding to continue to support students experiencing homelessness.

**While the pandemic is officially over, the crisis of homelessness is unabated and growing. Without urgent action at all levels — congressional, federal, state, and local — an extraordinary opportunity to help some of our nation’s most vulnerable students will be missed, prolonging and exacerbating broader educational challenges for schools and students.**

- Congress should extend the obligation deadline by at least one school year to ensure that all ARP-HCY funds are used strategically to support increasing numbers of students experiencing homelessness. Congress also should increase annual funding for the McKinney-Vento Act’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding
- The U.S. Department of Education should expedite and clarify extended liquidation processes; provide clear, timely responses to all questions related to allowable use of ARP-HCY funds; and clarify that all of the allowable uses described in the September 2023 guidance extend to annual Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding.
- State education leaders should request extended liquidation of ARP-HCY funds; publicize ARP-HCY allocations and balances on SEA websites; conduct shared outreach to school superintendents, school district liaisons, and school finance officers; and expedite budget amendment, procurement, and other administrative processes.
- Local education leaders should allow all federally approved uses of ARP-HCY funds; include school district homeless liaisons in ARP-HCY spending and sustainability decisions; and expedite budget amendment, procurement, and other administrative processes.
- State legislatures should provide dedicated, specific resources to support the identification and support of students experiencing homelessness and revise state laws to remove barriers to the success of students experiencing homelessness.



# INTRODUCTION

For children and youth experiencing homelessness, public schools are a critical source of help. Schools offer stability, services, and the education necessary to permanently escape homelessness and secure a brighter future. Yet homelessness creates barriers to education. Students without a stable place to live face difficulties even getting to school. More than half (52%) are chronically absent, a rate that jumped 20% following the pandemic and is now 22 percentage points higher than other students. Chronic absenteeism, in turn, contributes to a high school graduation rate of just 68% for students experiencing homelessness, 12 percentage points lower than other low-income students. Still, especially for students experiencing homelessness, education is crucial: failing to graduate high school is also the single greatest risk factor for future homelessness.

Children and youth experiencing homelessness suffered disproportionately from school building closures during the pandemic, yet their needs went largely unmet, even as districts received pandemic relief funds. In fact, only 18% of school district homeless liaisons reported CARES Act funding was used to support students experiencing homelessness. In response, a bipartisan amendment allocated \$800 million of the American Rescue Plan Act PreK-12 education funds to help schools identify and support homeless students through specific dedicated funding. The amendment passed the U.S. Senate unanimously, creating the American Rescue Plan – Homeless Children and Youth, or ARP-HCY funds.

**Above all, Congress should extend the obligation deadline by at least one school year to ensure that all ARP-HCY funds are used strategically to support increasing numbers of students experiencing homelessness.**

ARP-HCY funds have proven immensely impactful in many school districts across the nation, and have directly contributed to increased school stability, identification, and attendance. But bureaucratic red tape and restrictions, combined with a lack of clear guidance, have prevented ARP-HCY funds in many communities from helping vulnerable students at a time of heightened need. Moreover, educational agencies have prioritized the much larger ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds (ARP ESSER, funded at \$122 billion), overshadowing efforts to effectively use ARP-HCY funds. In fact, states have spent ARP ESSER nearly 50% faster than ARP-HCY funds, despite the fact that ARP-HCY funds are less than 1% of ARP ESSER funds. [1]

Now, with just seven more months to use ARP-HCY funds, urgent action is needed at all levels – congressional, federal, state, and local – to ensure that we don't miss this extraordinary opportunity to help some of our nation's most vulnerable students. Above all, Congress should extend the obligation deadline by at least one school year to ensure that all ARP-HCY funds are used strategically to support increasing numbers of students experiencing homelessness.

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[1] According to a SHC analysis of publicly available spending data. See methodology on page 31 for more information.

# Key Findings

To assess the impact of ARP-HCY funding and the challenges facing school districts in putting these funds to use, SHC conducted a national survey of school district homeless liaisons – staff designated under federal law to identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Key findings of this survey and recent federal data on homelessness include:





# KEY FINDING #1

→ Child and youth homelessness has increased since the pandemic.

- The number of families in homeless shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 16% in 2023, while the number of unaccompanied youth in shelters and visibly unsheltered increased by 15%. These numbers represent a small fraction of the number of families and youth identified as homeless by public schools, who are unable to access shelter due to lack of availability, fear, and eligibility requirements that exclude the vast majority of homeless children and youth in need of shelter.
- Nearly half of school district homeless liaisons surveyed reported higher numbers of students experiencing homelessness in late 2023/early 2024 than at the same time the previous year, while less than a tenth reported lower numbers.
  - Of liaisons who reported identifying more students experiencing homelessness, 85% attributed it, at least in part, to actual increases in homelessness, in addition to improved identification.
    - The top reasons given for increased homelessness were evictions (63%), increased family stressors due to abuse, neglect, addiction, mental health issues (58%), and job loss/unemployment (46%).
    - Three-fourths of liaisons attributed the increased homelessness to more than one factor, demonstrating the complex multiple causes of homelessness.
  - Fewer than one tenth of liaisons reported a decrease in the number of identified homeless students. An overall decline in public school enrollment (29%) topped the list of reasons for these decreases.

## Top Reasons Given for Increased Homelessness:

- #1: Evictions (63%)
- #2: Increased family stressors due to abuse, neglect, addiction, & mental health issues (58%)
- #3: Job loss/unemployment (46%)

1.2M

# of PreK-12 students experiencing homelessness

16%

Percent increase in the number of families in homeless shelters

15%

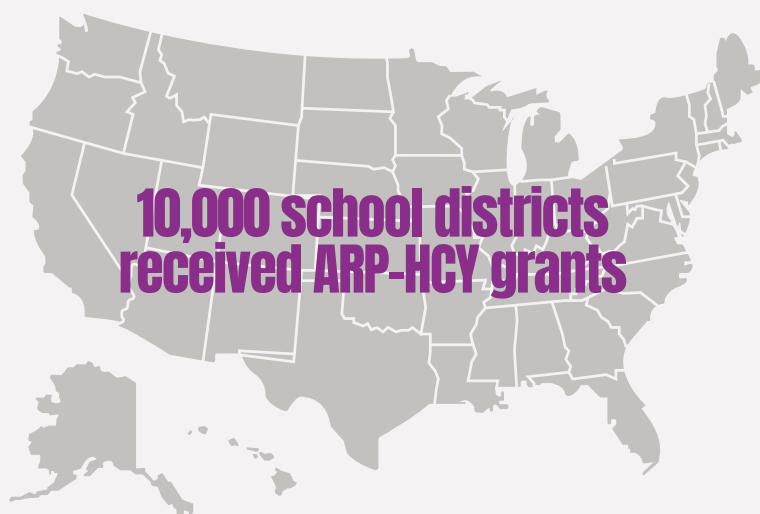
Percent increase in the number of unaccompanied youth in shelters

*"I have many young students who are living in their cars and need food. Not every area has food banks, open shelters, or food pantries at their schools to help."*  
- Ohio

*"We have an emergency shelter in our area but it is usually full. They refer out to other shelters, which are usually very far away from our community. We also do not have a homeless shelter for women in our area."* - Georgia

## KEY FINDING #2

→ The number of school districts receiving dedicated funding to support students experiencing homelessness has more than doubled as a result of ARP-HCY funding. Many school districts now receiving ARP-HCY funds have never before received specific funding to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.



- ARP-HCY grants have reached nearly 10,000 [2] school districts, according to data SHC compiled from 48 states and the District of Columbia. This figure represents over half of all school districts, and almost two-and-a-half times the number of school districts supported by annual funding through the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program.
- Approximately 6,000 districts now receiving ARP-HCY didn't receive EHCY the previous year; for many of these districts, ARP-HCY is the first dedicated funding for homeless students that they have ever received.

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*"Being able to do more outreach and improve community awareness has been so valuable, and this could not have occurred without the ARP funds. We also implemented a very successful virtual tutoring program and provided wrap around services to support students at risk."*

**- Pennsylvania**


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*"Hired a part time McKinney-Vento Case Manager to support "boots on the grounds" efforts. This is a significant help to the district McKinney-Vento liaison and has truly helped us to better support & identify our homeless students and families."* **- North Carolina**

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[2] This count includes districts that received funds as part of a consortium, and is therefore larger than the total number of ARP-HCY grants. We consider this figure to likely be an undercount as we are missing ARP-HCY grantee data from two states and Puerto Rico.






**"The ability to provide a store card for groceries has been a life-saver for our families. I can hardly believe I won that fight with finance, but persistence paid off, literally. Transportation by use of SpEd buses for school of origin is currently non-existent due to logistics and the fact that our SpEd buses are already at capacity with hundreds of SpEd students. ARP-HCY funds have afforded taxi use when city bus passes won't work for young children or families with similar working hours. These funds have made all the difference in the world to these vulnerable students." - Alaska**

**"Increased family engagement as the ability to provide store cards has helped increase communication and contact with struggling parents." - New York**

**"We have been able to support our rapidly growing McKinney-Vento population with hotels, school supplies, uniforms, hygiene items, and extra support services for academic growth. Having the money available when we have an urgent need makes all the difference for our families in need." - Arizona**

**"We purchased a van that is solely dedicated to supporting students identified as McKinney-Vento. We are developing a structure that includes hiring a driver, running routes, and mobile outreach." - Wisconsin**



# KEY FINDING #3

→ Schools are taking advantage of the unique flexibility of ARP-HCY funds to meet a wide variety of urgent needs in ways that were not previously allowable with other federal funding sources.

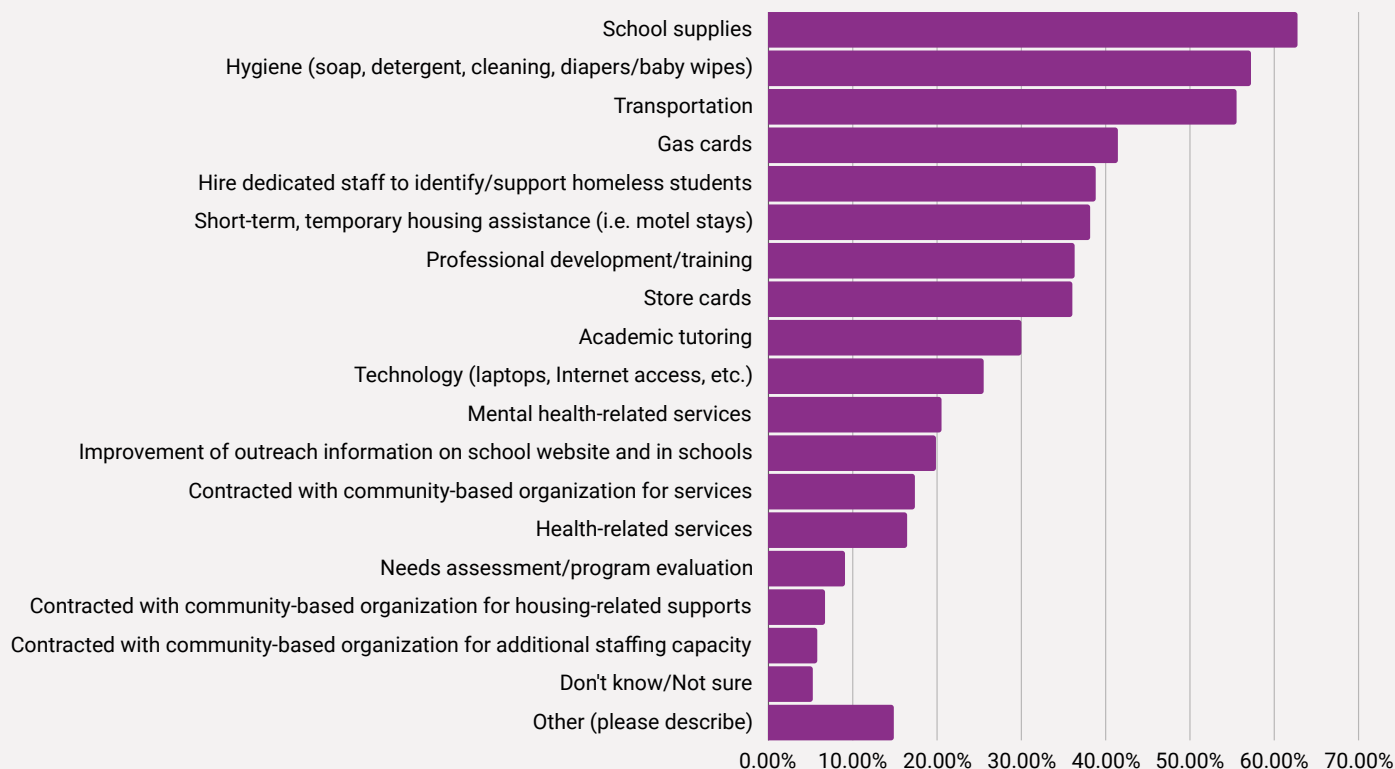
ARP-HCY funds are uniquely flexible and can be used in ways that have not been previously allowed by EHCY. This flexibility includes much needed support to remove barriers to attendance, such as store cards, short-term motel stays, car repair, and cell phones.

- More than 90% of school districts reported that they are using, or planning to use, ARP-HCY funds in multiple ways to address student needs.
- One-in-five school districts are contracting with community-based organizations to provide wraparound services, such as mental health support, after school academic programming, and housing-related assistance.

1 in 5

One-in-five school districts are contracting with community-based organizations to provide wraparound services.

## How has your LEA used, or planned to use, ARP-HCY I and/or II funds? (Check all that apply)

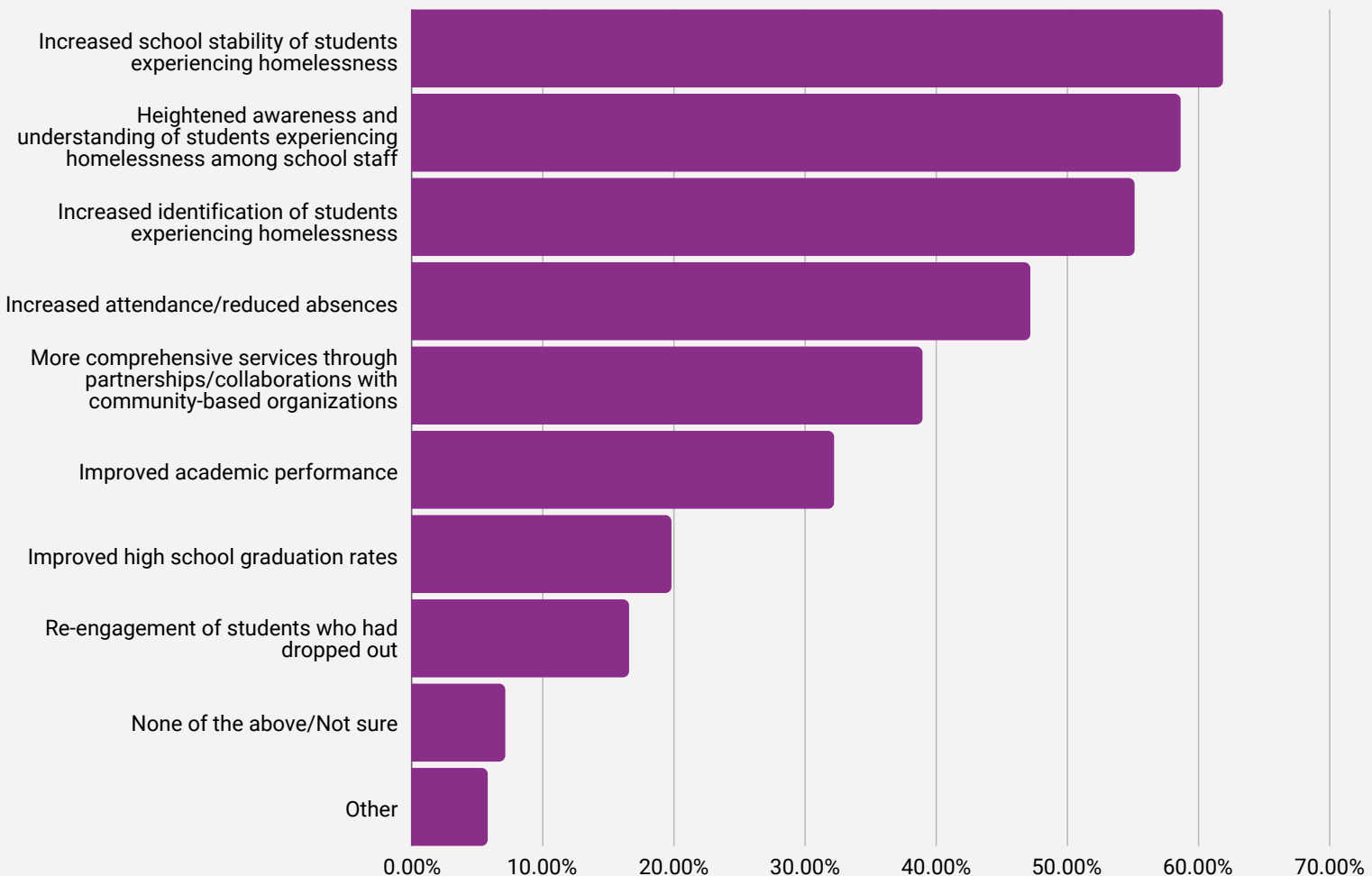


## KEY FINDING #4

→ School district homeless liaisons report many positive impacts of ARP-HCY funds, including those that directly or indirectly counter some of the widespread current crises in public education: declining enrollment, chronic absence, mental health problems, and lagging academic achievement.

- The most frequently cited impacts of ARP-HCY funds include:
  - Increased school stability with fewer mid-year school transfers (64%)
  - Increased identification (60%)
  - Increased attendance/reduced absences (49%)
  - More comprehensive services through partnerships with community organizations (40%)
- Liaisons who reported they received ARP-HCY funds were twice as likely to report an increase in student homelessness due in part to better outreach and more staffing capacity.

**From your perspective, what are some positive impacts of your ARP-HCY funds thus far, to date?**





*"While we have seen improvement in all the areas above, most of the data suggest we are assisting students experiencing homelessness to maintain levels commensurate to students not experiencing homelessness."* - **Washington state**

*"We had a 14% decrease in chronic absenteeism for homeless students."* - **California**

*"I visited for weeks on end many extremely remote communities where there are no emergency services or no human services / mental health, or places simply disconnected from CDE. It was very worthy! They were so thankful someone came to them!"* - **Colorado**

*"Hired a part time McKinney-Vento Case Manager to support "boots on the grounds" efforts. This is a significant help to the district MKV liaison and has truly helped us to better support & identify our homeless students and families."* - **North Carolina**

*"Staff size is making a difference in the students and families situations. They get more personalized and individual contact by staff to access necessary services."* - **Texas**

*"ARP has allowed us our first step in building up our relationships with families. That was a large barrier in families willingness to have conversations and shop at the Family Resource Center to be their own advocates. With games to check out and gas cards available, two of the largest asked supports from families, the families seem to be feeling heard and open to further collaboration."* - **Washington state**

*"Prevention of students who were considering or planning to drop out. It has also led to increased awareness and investment in this work among district leadership. Finally, it has led to increased capacity (staff) to do the actual work!"* - **California**

*"Payment of gas cards and hotel stays have been a tremendous help."* - **Ohio**

*"The extra staffing has been extremely valuable. Our M-V community specialist has been able to make personal contact with families and build relationships where it hasn't been possible before."* - **Washington state**

*"My Region used ARP-HCY 1 funding to hire Outreach Specialists and also to conduct a robust marketing campaign to get more information out into the community. Identification is increasing, but our families are also facing more challenges."* - **Pennsylvania**

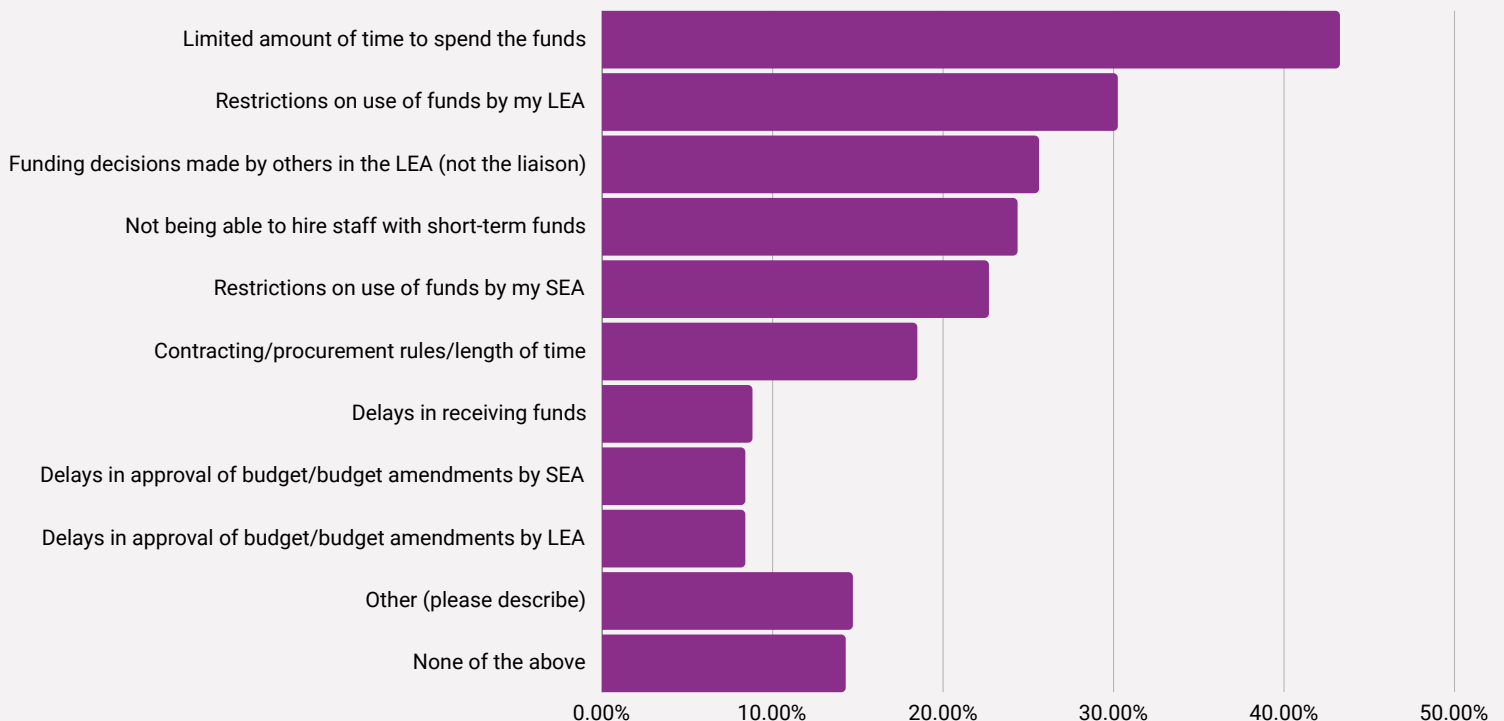
*"I know students were empowered via new phones, laptops.... I know district staff finally felt more empowered with the Emergency Student Survival Support Cards / Visa debit cards; they could lovingly respond with action to help eliminate their educational barriers."* - **Colorado**

# KEY FINDING #5

→ Despite these positive impacts, one-quarter of school district homeless liaisons surveyed indicated that they may not be able to obligate all of their funds by the September 2024 deadline; an additional 25% [3] were not aware that their school districts had received ARP-HCY funds – a sign of a greater disconnect between school district homeless liaisons and local educational leadership.

- One-quarter of school district homeless liaisons indicated that they may not be able to obligate all of their ARP-HCY funds by the September 2024 deadline due to the limited amount of time and/or administrative hurdles. School district homeless liaisons who indicated their school districts were “somewhat likely” or “not likely” to obligate all of their ARP-HCY funds by the deadline cited the following as the top reasons:
  - The limited amount of time to spend the funds (51%)
  - Restrictions on use of funds by the LEA that go beyond federal requirements (30%)
  - Not being able to hire staff with short-term funds (24%)
- An additional estimated 25% of school district homeless liaisons were unaware their district received ARP-HCY funds, potentially making it difficult to meet spending deadlines.

**If you answered “not likely” or “somewhat likely,” what are the reasons that ARP-HCY funds might not be spent (check all that apply)**



[3] Estimation from a SHC analysis of ARP-HCY grantee lists received from 28 states and the District of Columbia.

## Challenges From Tight Deadlines and Bureaucratic Barriers



*"My hands are tied in every way...so much red-tape. An endless amount of hoops to try and jump through to try and access funds." - Texas*

*"I am beyond grateful for the funds we have received. However the stress of spending the money in a short amount of time, and some of the stipulations are making it challenging to fulfill all the needs of the grant. I just want to be able to help our students, and some of the hoops we have to jump through along the way make it difficult in urgent situations." - Michigan*

*"LEA denied usage of funds even though the usage was allowable by the federal government. Another barrier is the length of time for contracts, finance process and approval, etc. (for example, it was one year before the after school program could be implemented)."*

**- North Carolina**

*"My Finance Office didn't allow me to use my ARP-HCY funds for the first fiscal year after receiving the Award and because of that, I'm behind in my expenditures. In the time that the application was accepted, I've had three Directors, all new Administrators in the Cabinet including Finance and Grant Administration. I don't want to let any of those funds go if I can help it! Extra time would allow for more opportunities and thoughtful interactions for our students and families. Additional time will also aid in my efforts of explaining the grant to all of the new administration again because these are the same people who will decide student outcomes through my plan for expenditures." - Alaska*

*"I am not sure how funds are used because whenever the building liaisons request assistance for things like glasses, cab transportation, clothing, etc., we are advised that we need to exhaust ALL community resources before we can help families. There is not enough time in the day to call community partners for every family in need. Sometimes it is a reasonable ask, but often we are out of luck. I have yet to make any purchases for families this school year. I feel like we are creating more barriers for families."*

**- New Hampshire**



## KEY FINDING #6

→ Although liaisons are legally responsible for identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness, they are often excluded from key decisions about use of funding.

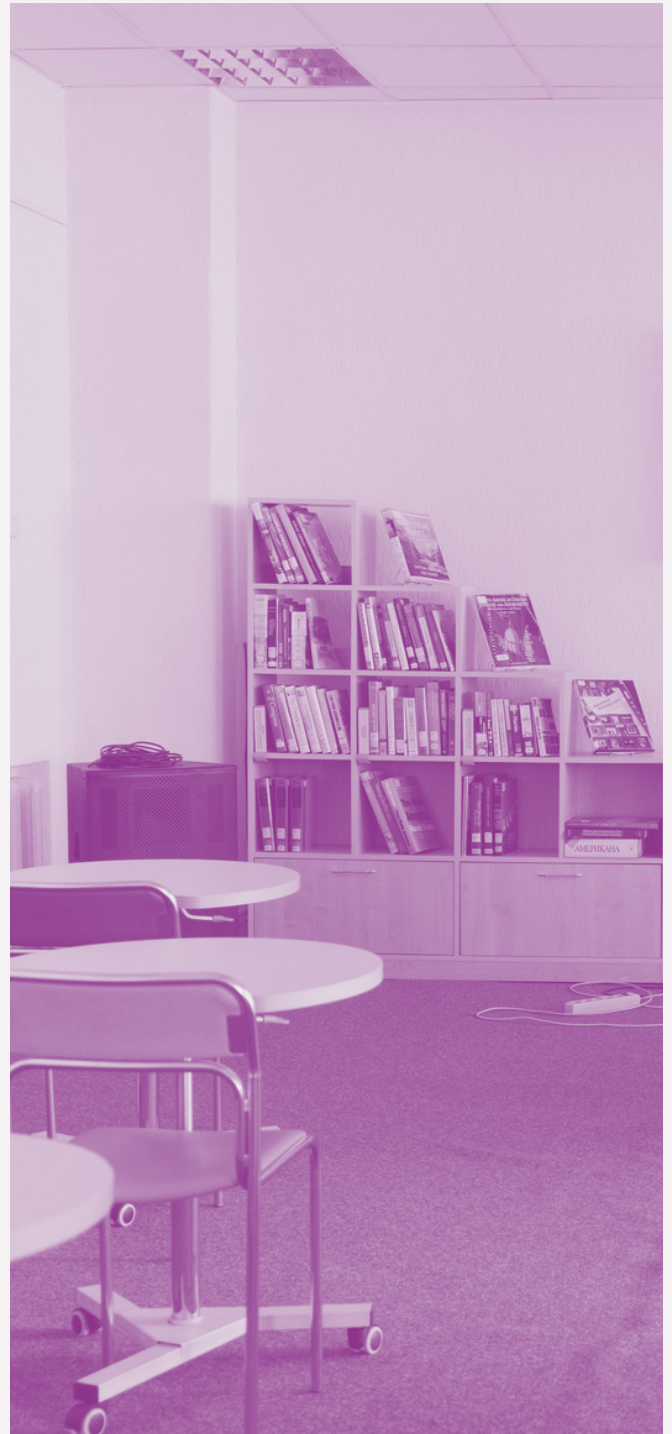
- Of school district homeless liaisons who indicated that they may not be able to use all of their funds to help homeless students by the September 2024 deadline, 25% stated that not being a part of funding decisions in the LEA was a contributing factor.
- One in four school district homeless liaisons said they needed approval by the LEA in order to use funds to meet homeless students' identified needs.
- Liaisons also wrote in responses that, as homeless liaisons, they are not part of sustainability conversations in their school districts.

“

*“Unfortunately, my position does not have much say on ways to sustain the ARP-HCY services.” - Florida*

*“My district chose to use the funds for a portion of my salary with no input from me as the McKinney-Vento Liaison.” - Anonymous*

*“This is not in my position.”  
- Washington state*



## KEY FINDING #7

→ **Staff turnover in the homeless liaison position, and lack of homeless liaison capacity, also emerged as challenges across survey responses.**

- At the state level, there was a nearly 50% turnover rate in the position of State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth from April 2021 to January 2024. The state coordinator is responsible for administering both ARP-HCY and the EHCY programs, including grant allocations, amendments, technical assistance, oversight, and collaborating with state and local organizations. Periods of vacancy or turnover meant that in some states, LEAs received funds late or did not get questions answered.
- Many liaisons wrote in responses indicating that they faced challenges in using ARP-HCY funds because they were new in their positions, came into their positions late into the ARP-HCY program, and/or had many other responsibilities meeting the direct crisis needs of families. These responses are consistent with other research finding that most school district liaisons have other primary job titles and duties aside from their role as a homeless liaison. A [2019 study](#) found that in California, two thirds of all homeless liaisons spend fewer than five hours a week on their homeless liaison duties. These competing demands also created challenges for liaisons in planning for and using ARP-HCY funds.



*"This is only part of my job. My full time job is direct service with students at the high school level. I don't get paid for my role as our McKinney-Vento Liaison and I end up needing to complete most of my McKinney-Vento related tasks outside of my contracted work hours."*

**- Michigan**

*"Due to staff change over at the district level, we were not made aware of allocated funds until a year after they were given. Now we are trying to identify needs and figure out the logistics of the best way to use funds."*

**- Wisconsin**

*"Our McKinney-Vento program is way under capacity (department of 1) but my LEA would not approve hiring because the funds are not long term."*

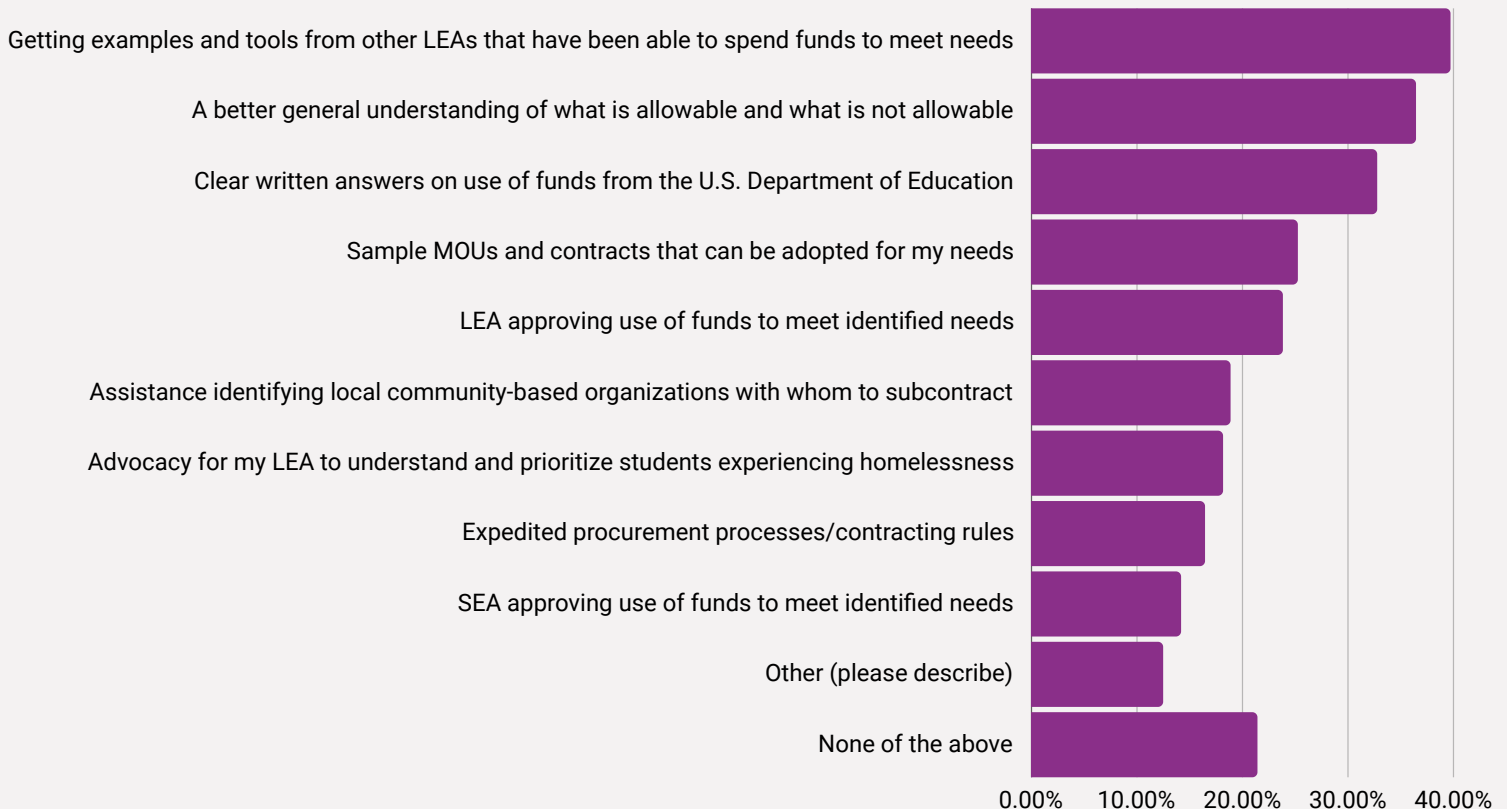
**- Oregon**

## KEY FINDING #8

→ More than two and a half years into the ARP-HCY program, many school district homeless liaisons still lack clarity about allowable uses of funds.

- When asked what would help spend ARP-HCY funds to serve students experiencing homelessness:
  - Nearly 37% of school district homeless liaisons indicated the need for a better understanding of allowable uses of funds
  - Nearly 33% said they would benefit from clear written answers from the U.S. Department of Education. While the U.S. Department of Education issued [guidance](#) in September 2023, this information is not reaching many school district homeless liaisons with the speed and consistency that is critical to appropriately spend time-limited one-time funding. Clear written answers from the U.S. Department of Education are still needed.

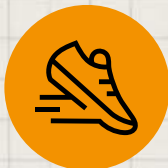
### What would help you spend your ARP-HCY funds to support students experiencing homelessness? (check all that apply)



## KEY FINDING #9

→ The majority of school district homeless liaisons (76%) want some form of practical assistance — examples from other school districts, sample MOUs, and connections to community-based organizations — in order to use ARP-HCY funds to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

- 40% of school district homeless liaisons stated it would be helpful to review examples and tools from other LEAs that have been able to spend funds to meet needs
- 25% want sample MOUs and contracts that can be adopted for their needs; and
- 19% want assistance identifying local community-based organizations with which to subcontract.



### **SERIES: FLEXING THE FLEXIBILITY OF ARP-HCY FUNDING**

**Making the Most of  
Federal Relief Dollars  
to Help Students  
Experiencing  
Homelessness**

[Click Here to Access the Resource](#)

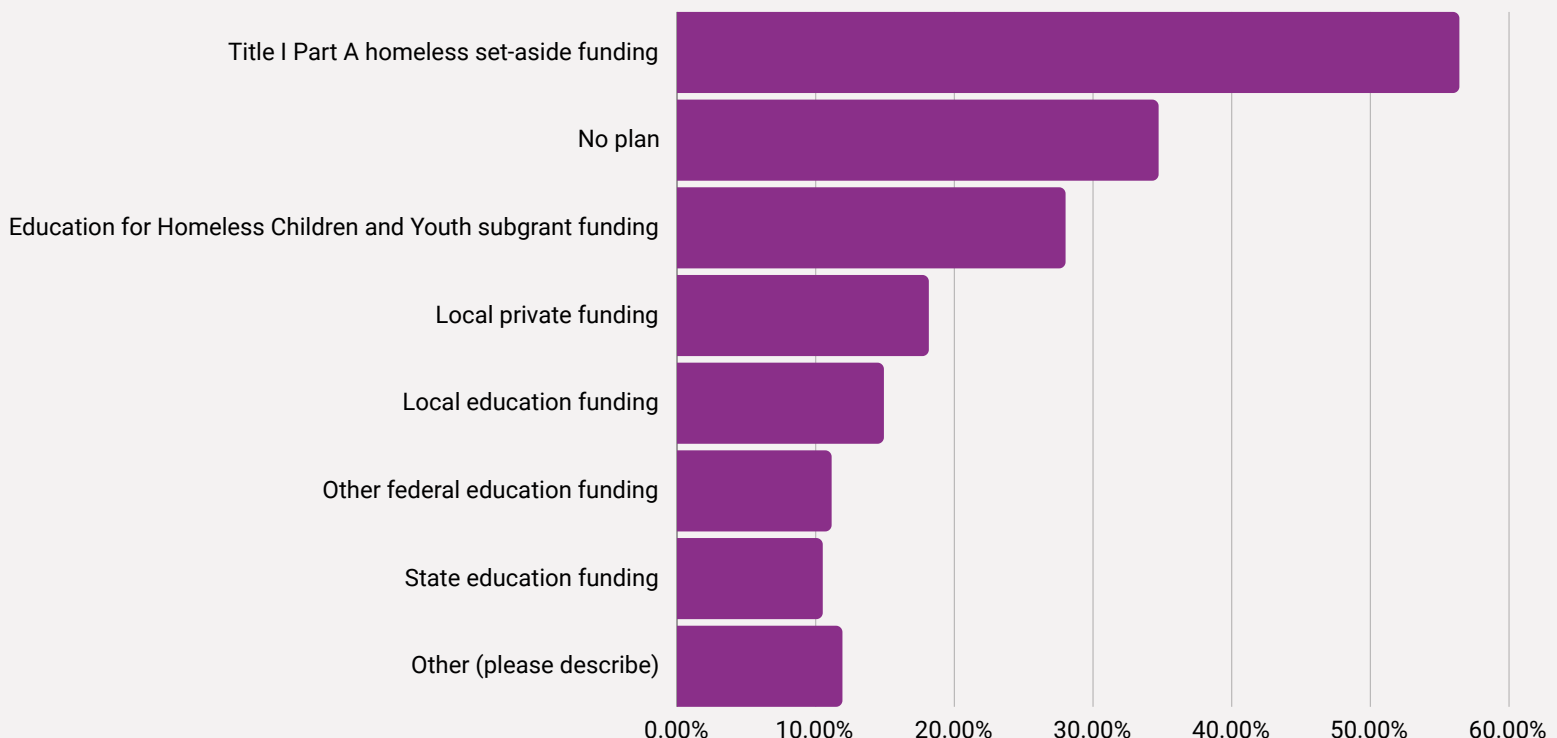
## KEY FINDING #10

→ Many school district homeless liaisons are unsure if or how they will sustain services or programming funded by ARP-HCY; the majority will look to some form of limited federal funding to continue to support students experiencing homelessness.

- Nearly 30% of school district homeless liaisons don't have any specific plans or ideas for how to sustain ARP-HCY services or programming.
- Sixty-eight percent of school district homeless liaisons will look for some form of federal funding to help sustain services:
  - 56% plan to use Title I Part A reservations for students experiencing homelessness, yet many expressed concern about the inadequacy of the Title I homeless set-aside to serve their students.
  - 28% plan to use McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) grants to sustain ARP-HCY programming, but EHCY annual funding only amounts to one-sixth of ARP-HCY funding. Nationally, only one in five school districts is able to receive an EHCY subgrant at the current appropriations level. At its current funding level, EHCY is not equipped to sustain ARP-HCY programming.

*"I am burdened at what & who will fall through the cracks without continued funding."*  
- North Carolina

**What are some of the ways you plan to sustain ARP-HCY services or programming?  
(Check all that apply)**



## Sustainability Challenges

**“Current funding has allowed for strong wrap-around services. These will be reduced significantly in the upcoming year without funding.” - Texas**

**“We likely will not be able to sustain at the same level, despite our numbers going up.” - North Dakota**

**“The amount that has been set aside isn't going to be adequate to provide our students in the same way that ARP-HCY funding has. It might be difficult to transition back to the lesser amount and not being able to provide store cards for instance.” - Alaska**

**“We will continue to utilize other state/federal funding sources, but are concerned about sustaining the outcomes we have seen with the conclusion of the ARP-HCY funding.”  
- Florida**

**“My district has recently discovered that we have a deficit so once ARP-HCY goes away, there won't be extra funding to sustain the work that was afforded through use of those funds. The Title IA set-aside is out of my hands.” - Alaska**







## **What is Needed Moving Forward: More Time and Sustainable Increased Resources**

**"We have not had enough time to appropriately spend the money that was allocated. I would hate to see the liaisons try to quickly spend the money when it would be better used throughout another school year."**

**- Arizona**

**"More time to spend the money, the time frame is way too short to spend it all and utilize the funds appropriately based on their stipulations. Just trusting that the LEA will use the funds appropriately to best serve our most vulnerable families."**

**- Michigan**

**"The funds would be better utilized spread over a longer period of time."**

**- California**

**"School districts can't sustain ARP service levels with just our Title I set-aside. Additional subgrant funds would help, but our district isn't willing to hire staff without a guarantee the funds will be there long term."**

**- Oregon**



# Recommendations

While the pandemic is officially over, the crisis of homelessness is unabated and growing. Congress dedicated specific funding to address the educational and related needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness in part because prior pandemic relief packages – education and housing – were not reaching them. Yet ARP-HCY funds have taken a back seat to the much larger and more generalized education pandemic relief funds (ARP ESSER), relegating the educational challenges of children and youth experiencing homelessness to an afterthought. Leadership and urgent action is needed at every level to ensure that these funds are used effectively now and sustained into the future.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

## → Congress Should:

**Extend the obligation deadline for ARP-HCY funds by one year – from September 2024 to September 2025 – in order to ensure that all ARP-HCY funds are used strategically to support increasing numbers of students experiencing homelessness.** While ARP-HCY funds were provided as a form of pandemic relief, there is clear evidence that homelessness is worse now than during the pandemic, and that children and youth experiencing homelessness continue to suffer disproportionately from pandemic-related educational challenges such as chronic absence and mental health. Moreover, education agencies at every level – federal, state, and local – have prioritized spending the much larger source of pandemic education recovery funds (ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds), rather than ARP-HCY. A one-year extension in the ARP-HCY obligation deadline would allow schools to use ARP-HCY funds in the most strategic way possible to meet current needs throughout the 2024-2025 school year. This would also ensure that rather than spending for spending's sake, school district homeless liaisons could use the funds to meet needs as they arise in the most impactful way. A longer timeline also would allow state education agencies time to reallocate ARP-HCY funds more equitably to communities with unique needs. Finally, an extended obligation timeline would provide more time for schools to figure out how to sustain the innovative programming and partnerships that have been put in place and have been effective in increasing the identification of students in need of support.

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*"Knowing early that we had an extension would keep us from rushing to spend on items that may not actually be top priority. Let me give an example. We are doing hotel vouchers. If we knew we had one more year, we would not rush to spend funds on 'items' just to expend the funds. We would hold on to what we need to ensure we can keep this bridge service in place."* - **Arizona**

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*"Now that there is a better understanding of how ARP-HCY funds can be used and we have developed a stronger collaborative system with outside agencies, extending the time allotted for spending these funds would be beneficial. This would enable us to intentionally provide needed assistance to our families, without duplication."* - **West Virginia**

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

## → Congress Should:

**Increase annual funding for the McKinney-Vento Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding.** The need for specific, dedicated funding to identify and support students experiencing homelessness was great before the pandemic, and is even greater now. No other federal program has the responsibility for and expertise in finding, engaging, and serving these students and upholding their educational rights. Funding EHCY at the same level as ARP-HCY – an appropriation of \$800 million – is less than 1% of the total federal K-12 education budget but would ensure basic school access for at least 2.4% of all identified preK-12 students (The true number of students experiencing homelessness is undoubtedly higher, and a pre-pandemic CDC survey found that 5.8% of all high school students experience homelessness at some point over a given school year). Without that basic access – help with school enrollment, attendance, and stability – these students will not be able to benefit from any other local, state, or federal education investment.

Many school districts that received ARP-HCY funds will not be able to receive EHCY funding due to the much lower appropriation level. Therefore, a higher appropriation for the EHCY program also would sustain the level of support provided to students experiencing homelessness that has been provided through ARP-HCY. Without an increase in annual EHCY funding, the percent of school districts receiving dedicated funding to support students experiencing homelessness will drop from 54% to 21%, leaving many homeless students with the assistance they need to participate and succeed in school.

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*“A long term funding source, beyond the Title I Set Aside, is necessary. We need funding to come to schools, not to local non-profits who have limited staff to process applications in a timely fashion. Empower school districts and provide us the funding since we work directly with homeless families. We can do the work more efficiently if we have the funds and permission to spend them accordingly.” - Oregon*

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## → The U.S. Department of Education should:

**Expedite and clarify the process for extending the liquidation of ARP-HCY funds.** Extended liquidation is a process by which ED is permitted to extend the period for liquidating, or spending, federal funds that have been properly obligated by statutory deadlines. If approved, extended liquidation would allow education agencies an additional 14 months to spend ARP-HCY funds, until March 2026. While extended liquidation does not address the most pressing and significant challenges facing school district homeless liaisons, and is in no way a substitute for an extension of the ARP-HCY obligation deadline, it still could be an important way to ensure that ARP-HCY funds are leveraged for a longer period of time.

ED should release ARP-HCY extended liquidation information and processes as soon as possible; streamline and simplify the application process; and expedite its approval process, so that there is no or minimal disruption of services to children and youth experiencing homelessness. ED also should communicate clear, detailed information about how states can use extended liquidation to help school districts make the best decisions about obligating their ARP-HCY funds.

**Provide clear, timely responses to all questions related to allowable use of ARP-HCY funds, including answers to common questions that have already been answered by ED.** ED's guidance on allowable uses of ARP-HCY funds was informed by ongoing questions and needs of practitioners. However, it was not issued until September 2023, with only one year remaining to obligate ARP-HCY funds. The fact that so many liaisons still have questions about allowable uses of funds suggests that the information is not getting out, and/or that further clarity is needed. In addition, ED has not provided answers to questions it receives from individual states and LEAs about use of ARP-HCY funds to all states, which prevents states from learning about the circumstances under which ED has permitted specific uses. Making this information more broadly available online will expedite spending and provide clarity and ideas to state and local educational agencies.

**Clarify that all of the allowable uses described in the September 2023 guidance extend to annual Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) funding.** The flexibility of ARP-HCY funds has transformed the way that school districts meet the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. School district liaisons report tremendous impact in being able to use funds creatively to stabilize families and youth, remove barriers to attendance, build trust, and holistically support better community partnerships. For example, car repairs and gas cards are often less expensive and more effective ways to ensure transportation to school, and increase attendance. Being able to use funds for short-term motel stays helps to ensure safety and stability, while increasing regular school attendance; it also puts families on a quicker path to longer-term stable housing, which in turn improves educational outcomes. Having clear, specific, affirmative guidance stating that all of the ARP-HCY allowable uses will continue under EHCY funding also will help schools sustain ARP-HCY initiatives and incorporate lessons learned into future programming and services.

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*"Being able to spend funds on items like cell phones and gas cards has been such a life-saver to so many families. I would LOVE to see the list of HYC allowable expenditures widened to look more like the list of allowable expenditures through ARP."*

*- Homeless Liaison, Arizona*

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*"In addition to supporting more programs, the ARP-HCY funds provide greater flexibility on what is allowable. For example, a huge plus for families is the ability for me to provide store cards (for sneakers and underwear, for example) rather than my purchasing these items for the families. I would argue that being able to make their own selections is better for the kids, physically and emotionally. This is an allowable expense in ARP-HCY that is not allowed elsewhere."*

*- Homeless Liaison, Rhode Island*



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE EDUCATION AGENCY LEADERS

## → State Education Agency Leaders should:

**Request extended liquidation of ARP-HCY funds from ED.** If and when ED announces the process for requesting extending liquidation of ARP-HCY funds, states should request this additional time on behalf of LEAs so that ARP-HCY funds that have been obligated by the deadline may continue to be used for an additional 14 months. If approved, this would allow for contracted services to continue through the 2024-2025 school year, helping provide greater capacity and more comprehensive services for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

**Publicize ARP-HCY allocations and balances on SEA websites and conduct shared outreach to school superintendents, school business officers, and school district liaisons. SEAs should communicate to all parties simultaneously about ARP-HCY balances and plans for using ARP-HCY funds to meet identified needs.** It is very concerning that with only eight months left to obligate ARP-HCY funding, so many school district homeless liaisons do not even know that their school districts have ARP-HCY funds. State education leaders should help to close the communication gap between the LEA staff with budgeting authority and the LEA staff who know the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness by communicating with the same information at the same time, and following up with specific examples of how other LEAs in the state are using funds, sample forms, and other practical assistance.

**Expedite budget amendment, procurement, and other administrative processes.** In light of the time remaining, states should quickly approve budget amendments to allow LEAs to pivot to uses of ARP-HCY funds that are now clearly allowed, and that may be more responsive to the current needs of students and families. Contracting and procurement also should be expedited in light of the urgency of homelessness and the approaching obligation deadline. For example, SEA finance teams should work with State EHCY Coordinators to share existing approved vendor lists, or processes to expedite contracts and RFPs for new vendors, allowing funds to be quickly dispersed to contracted service providers.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY LEADERS

## → Local Educational Agency Leaders should:

**Allow all federally approved uses of ARP-HCY funds.** Local education leaders, including superintendents and school business officers, should quickly familiarize themselves with the federally allowable uses of ARP-HCY funds, and not restrict the use of these funds. There are numerous examples of how LEAs have ensured program integrity and accountability, and devised methods of tracking, to address the most common concerns about some of the most unusual uses of funds, such as store cards or motel stays or purchasing vehicles. These unusual uses may be the very ones that are the most impactful and strategic in meeting broader goals of increasing enrollment, attendance, and performance.

**Include school district homeless liaisons in ARP-HCY spending and sustainability decisions.** Survey responses make clear that the school district staff with the most knowledge of the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness in their communities - school district homeless liaisons - are left out of critical conversations and decisions about use of funds. School leaders will not successfully tackle the broader post-pandemic challenges of declining enrollment, chronic absenteeism, or student mental health without specifically addressing homelessness – and that means learning from their own staff who see these needs daily, and incorporating their knowledge into both spending and sustainability conversations.

**Expedite budget amendment, procurement, and other administrative processes.** Local education leaders also should quickly approve budget amendments to allow LEAs to pivot to uses of ARP-HCY funds that are now clearly allowed, and that may be more responsive to the current identified needs of students and families. Contracting and procurement also should be expedited in light of the urgency of homelessness and the approaching obligation deadline.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE LEGISLATURES

## → State Legislatures should:

**Provide dedicated, specific resources to support the identification and support of students experiencing homelessness and revise state laws to remove barriers to success.** Only a handful of states direct state dollars specifically to support students experiencing homelessness, and of those states, only three – Washington, Colorado, and Maine – provide funding that directly supplements the federal EHCY program by going to LEAs for a broad range of services. This is in sharp contrast to the number of states and amount of state funding to address homelessness more broadly. California, for example, has committed more than \$30 billion in state funding to address housing and homelessness since 2019, yet none of it has been directed to preK-12 students experiencing homelessness. In light of the clear connection between educational attainment and future homelessness – the fact that lack of a high school degree or GED is the single greatest risk factor associated with homelessness as a young adult – targeted funding to address student homelessness is a key mitigation and prevention strategy. Dedicated state homeless education funding also would allow some of the innovative programming and services made possible by ARP-EHCY to continue into the future. States will not effectively counteract the long-term impacts of the pandemic on education without a concerted, resourced effort to identify and support students who experience homelessness.

**Revise state laws to remove barriers to the success of students experiencing homelessness.** While the federal McKinney-Vento Act contains many provisions designed to help children and youth experiencing homelessness succeed in school, state legislation has a key role to play in a variety of issues, such as limiting punitive school discipline practices, requiring the award of partial credits, mitigating the impact of school mobility on high school graduation, and boosting preschool enrollment and stability. State legislatures should consult with school district liaisons, service providers, and parents and youth with lived experience as they develop policy recommendations. SHC has published a summary of state laws to increase high school graduation of students experiencing homelessness.

# METHODOLOGY

Data in this report was taken from an open-access survey conducted by SchoolHouse Connection from November 6, 2023 to January 12, 2024. The target population for this survey was strictly those serving as school district homeless liaisons, a role designated by the federal McKinney-Vento Act to identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Respondents participated via self-administered web surveys hosted on SurveyMonkey. Respondents were recruited via 1) individual emails sent to all school district homeless liaisons; and 2) an e-newsletter sent to a broad network of individuals who subscribe to SHC's e-newsletter, many of whom are liaisons. Before data quality checks, we received 1545 responses. After data quality checks, we were left with 1441 responses which represent all fifty states and the District of Columbia and nearly 10% of the entire nation's school district homeless liaisons. The maximum margin of sampling error calculated with the finite population correction at the 95% confidence level for our sample of 1,441 respondents is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. We then calculated the frequencies and proportions of responses.

The questionnaire was developed by SchoolHouse Connection in consultation with researchers from the University of California, San Francisco. A full list of exact questions asked and exact answer options can be found [here](#).

## **Data quality checks**

To ensure high-quality data, SchoolHouse Connection performed data quality checks to identify any respondents that were not included in the target population. This includes checking for whether respondents were indeed McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons or left questions blank at very high rates. As a result of this checking, 104 respondents were removed from the survey dataset prior to analysis.

## **How we determined states spent ARP-ESSER 50% faster than ARP-HCY**

Using publicly available spending data from [usaspending.gov](https://usaspending.gov), we tabulated the total percentage of ARP-ESSER and ARP-HCY funds states have spent. According to data last pulled in February 2024, states have spent 56% of ARP-ESSER funds, while states have spent only 38% of ARP-HCY funds. The absolute difference between ARP-ESSER and ARP-HCY spend-down rates is 18%. Noting that ARP-ESSER and ARP-HCY have the same deadlines and effectively the same start date, states spent ARP-ESSER 47% faster than ARP-HCY.

## How we estimated 25% of liaisons were unaware their district received ARP-HCY funds

Using a list of ARP-HCY grantees compiled from 30 states and the District of Columbia, we matched respondents' with their actual ARP-HCY grantee status. Our list represents ARP-HCY grantees from the following states: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia (DC), Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin.

It was not feasible to manually match respondents in a timely fashion, so we opted for an automated matching method. Of the 803 respondents that indicated they received ARP-HCY funds on the survey, we matched 404 (50.3%). We believe this discrepancy is due to the fact that we are missing ARP-HCY grantee data from states not represented in our compiled list, typos or errors made by respondents, as well as differences in how respondents and state agencies report LEA names.

Under the assumptions that respondents who indicated they received ARP-HCY funds did indeed receive funds and that our matching methodology is not unfairly biased, we weighted the number of actual matched responses accordingly.

	<b>Respondents we found received ARP-HCY funds depending on response answer</b>	<b>Total number of respondents we estimate truly received ARP-HCY funds depending on response answer</b>
<b>Yes</b>	404	803
<b>I'm not sure</b>	105	209
<b>No/Declined</b>	29	58

We directly matched 105 respondents that marked “I’m not sure” on our list of ARP-HCY grantees. We estimate the true number of respondents that marked “I’m not sure” who actually received funds is 209, representing 51% of the total 412 respondents who marked “I’m not sure.”

We directly matched 29 respondents that marked “No” or “My LEA declined ARP-HCY funds” on our list of ARP-HCY grantees. We estimate the true number of respondents that marked they did not receive or declined ARP-HCY funds is 58, representing 33% of the total 178 respondents who marked their district did not receive or declined ARP-HCY funds.

Therefore, we estimate the true number of respondents that received ARP-HCY funds is 1070 (803 + 209 + 58). A total of 267 (25%) respondents whose LEA received ARP-HCY funds were unsure or incorrectly believed their LEA did not receive funds.

**How we found liaisons who were aware they received ARP-HCY funds were nearly twice as likely to report an increase in student homelessness due in part to better outreach.**

We first tallied the total number of responses from liaisons who were aware their LEA received ARP-HCY funds and responses from liaisons who weren’t sure or incorrectly believed their LEA did not receive funding.

	<b>Liaison reported they received ARP-HCY funding</b>	<b>Liaison reported they weren’t sure, didn’t receive, or declined ARP-HCY funding</b>
<b>Total count of responses</b>	803	639
<b>Count of responses which reported an increase in student homelessness due in part to better outreach</b>	350	154
<b>Proportion of responses which reported an increase in student homelessness due in part to better outreach</b>	43.56%	23.34%

The absolute difference between liaisons who reported they received ARP-HCY funding and liaisons that reported otherwise is 20.22%. Liaisons who reported they received ARP-HCY funding were 87% more likely than liaisons that reported otherwise to report an increase in student homelessness due to better outreach.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & DEDICATION

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This report is dedicated to school district homeless liaisons across the nation who carry the hopes and dreams of children, youth and their families in their hearts, and who persist in systems that sometimes do not see them or value their work. We hope this report does justice to your experiences, and elevates your voices to decision makers at every level.



SchoolHouse Connection is a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth. Our vision is that children and youth experiencing homelessness have full access to quality learning, prenatal through postsecondary, so they will never be homeless as adults, and the next generation will never be homeless.