

Supporting Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Webinar

On April 30, 2019, DPI staff co-hosted a webinar with Sarah MacFarland, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP) new Early Childhood Outreach Specialist, to address strategies for supporting young children experiencing homelessness. The [PowerPoint](#) and [audio recording](#) are now available on the [training resources page](#) of the DPI [homeless website](#).

Summer School Guidance

The National Center for Homeless Education has provided the following guidance on summer school:

- Students have the right to attend their school of origin or their school of residence for summer school. The district needs to have a conversation with the family to make a best interest determination for which school the student should attend, presuming that the school of origin is in the best interest of the student as stated in the McKinney-Vento Act.
- If a student attends a school of residence for summer school that does not change their right to attend their school of origin for the school year if they continue to experience homelessness.
- Districts must provide transportation when the student is required to attend summer school for instruction/academic support. If a summer school is only enrichment programming, then transportation might not be required since the summer school is not required for the student to attend.
- If the district provides transportation to summer school for non-homeless students, then transportation must be provided to students experiencing homelessness since it is a comparable service. Transportation is required for enrichment programs if the district transports other students to the same program.
- The school of origin district and the district of residence split the cost of transportation, even if one of the districts does not provide summer school for their own students.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Analysis

Adapted from [SchoolHouse Connection](#):

As you may know, the 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) included two questions about homelessness. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed high school data in 17 states, including Wisconsin, and found that young people experience homelessness at an even higher rate than reported. The YRBS indicates that 4.9% of students surveyed in the 17 states experienced homelessness at some point during the 2016-17 school year. In contrast, public schools reported only 2.57% of their students as experiencing homelessness. In other words, based on YRBS homelessness data, public schools are identifying only slightly more than half of students actually experiencing homelessness.

It is imperative that districts examine policies and procedures to ensure that they are identifying eligible students as experiencing homelessness in order to provide services and supports under McKinney-Vento. SchoolHouse Connection reports that as many as one million students nationwide are not receiving the services they are entitled to under the law. There are websites listed under the "Resources" section of this eBrief that provide detailed information on district responsibilities. If you have additional questions, please reach out to your state co-coordinators.

USDA Free Summer Meals App- Range

There is a new mobile app that helps families find free summer meals in Wisconsin and across the nation. The app is called [Range](#)—it's free and available for iPhones and Androids—and it uses data from the [USDA's Summer Food Service Program](#) to help school-aged youth locate free summer meals. Once summer starts in early June, youth will be able to find hundreds of USDA-sponsored free meal sites in every state. Please share this resource widely with families and youth.

Considerations for School Year Transitions

As the 2018-19 school year draws to a close, you are encouraged to check in with your students and families experiencing homelessness to connect them to resources for the summer. Make sure your district's Student Information System (SIS) is up-to-date with data on students experiencing homelessness.

You are also encouraged to begin thinking about your practices for the start of the 2019-20 school year:

- Before the new school year starts, you should contact each family who was in a homeless situation at the end of the 2018-19 school year to make a determination of eligibility based on their current living situation.
- Think about the district's enrollment practices and how to identify new students starting in the district. The DPI homeless website has many [sample forms](#) to help with the identification process.
- Think about how you will train all staff in your district on McKinney-Vento and the process to refer students to the homeless liaison. McKinney-Vento requires staff to be trained at least annually. There are many creative ways to ensure compliance with that requirement.
- Think about how you will provide awareness of youth homelessness in your school and community. The National Center for Homeless Education has [free resources](#) available!

eBrief Sign-Up

If you know of others who would like to receive this eBrief, please share [this link](#) so they can be added to our mailing list.

Data Now Available for 2017-18

Data is now available for the 2017-18 school year on the DPI [data page](#). At the top of the data page is an Excel workbook that can be downloaded in order to sort data. There are also tabs at the bottom that provide additional data points, including unaccompanied homeless youth and nighttime residence data.

State Coordinator Corner

Karen and Kristine have provided several professional development opportunities, including presenting at the CESA 2 Youth Homelessness Summit. They are busy working on additional training modules, including one focusing on unaccompanied homeless youth that will be available for the start of the 2019-20 school year.

Clara is busy with compliance monitoring. The EHCY team is excited about updates to our monitoring process (more information can be found on [our website](#)).

During a webinar on April 30th, we introduced our new team member, Sarah MacFarland, the WECCP's Early Childhood Outreach Specialist. We are excited for Sarah's expertise in reaching young children. Welcome Sarah!

The EHCY team is also working on updating our website to make it as helpful for you as possible. If you have any suggestions on what we can do to improve our website, please contact one of us!

Resources

[DPI EHCY website](#)
[NCHE](#)
[NAEHCY](#)
[SchoolHouse Connection](#)
[McKinney-Vento Act](#)
[McKinney-Vento Non-Regulatory Guidance](#)

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- Use the DPI EHCY [monitoring guidance](#) to ensure compliance with McKinney-Vento.
- If your district receives Title I funds, talk about utilizing a homeless reservation to help with educational costs such as transportation and fees. More information will be forthcoming on homeless reservations.

Additional strategies and requirements will be provided in our August eBrief.

Tips for Teachers and Staff: How to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Adapted from [SchoolHouse Connection](#):

School staff play a crucial role in creating a school environment that is safe and supportive for all students, especially those who are highly mobile and have experienced the trauma that often accompanies homelessness. The following is information and strategies that staff can use to support the educational success of students experiencing homelessness.

Be familiar with common characteristics of students experiencing homelessness, including:

- Enrollment at multiple schools, lack of records, gaps in learning, poor/inconsistent attendance.
- Poor hygiene, unmet medical/dental needs, wearing the same clothes repeatedly, and fatigue.
- Social and behavioral challenges, such as extreme shyness, withdrawal, or aggression; clinginess; difficulty with peer and/or adult relationships; poor attention span; anxiety late in the school day.
- Lack of participation in field trips and/or afterschool activities, lack of basic school supplies, and inability to complete special projects.

Strategies:

1. **Learn more about the McKinney-Vento Act and connect with your local liaison.** If you have a concern about a student, be sure to contact your district's homeless liaison right away. The DPI homeless website has a Homeless Liaison Directory with contact information for each school district. The directory can be found [here](#).
2. **Create a welcoming climate and build trust with all students.** Find time each week to check in with the student to assess unmet basic needs, offer encouragement, and recognize the child's talents and accomplishments. Pair new students with a "buddy" in the classroom or assign new students a classroom "job" and encourage involvement in extracurricular activities. These personal relationships can be critical.
3. **Help to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.** Many students are uncomfortable telling people at school about their living situation and asking for help. Be attentive to the stigma of homelessness and avoid using the word "homeless." Again, if you have concerns about a student, contact your district's liaison right away.
4. **Take a trauma-informed approach.** The experience of, and events leading up to, homelessness can expose students to violence, abuse, hunger, trafficking, and other traumatic experiences. Students may want or need to hold on to a particular possession in class, or need clear transitions or foreshadowing. Be aware of the needs of your students.
5. **Stabilize basic needs and support full participation.** Ensure the student has every opportunity to participate in school activities: contact the homeless liaison to find out how to provide school/project supplies, cover field trip fees, purchase uniforms, and meet other needs.
6. **Ensure classroom policies and procedures set students up for success.** [Disciplinary policies](#) must take homelessness into consideration. The linked article on positive school disciplinary practices is an excellent reference for school staff.
7. **Reach out to parents/caregivers.** Because parents may not have regular access to a phone, create a communication plan. Send the family a "welcome" letter and/or invite them to visit the classroom. Sometimes contacting parents/caregivers of unaccompanied homeless youth isn't recommended; consult with your district's liaison if you have concerns.

While a student's homeless status is protected under FERPA and may not be shared with school staff, the above strategies are best practices for all students, not just those experiencing homelessness. Connect with your district's liaison for additional strategies and best practices specific to your district.

A PDF of this eBrief is available on the [DPI EHCY Webpage](#)
A Newsletter from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction,
Carolyn Stanford Taylor, State Superintendent

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