FEDERAL CORONAVIRUS RELIEF FUNDS AND STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: HOW TO MAKE "ESSER II" FUNDS WORK FOR YOUR MCKINNEY-VENTO STUDENTS

SchoolHouse Connection

On December 21, Congress passed a second round of emergency coronavirus relief, including $54.3 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II). That money supplements the original $13 billion in ESSER funds provided through the CARES Act in March. ESSER II funds go directly to state and local educational agencies.

Not later than six months after receiving ESSER II funds, states must provide a **detailed accounting** of how they are using funds to measure and address learning loss among students disproportionately affected by the coronavirus and school closures, including **students experiencing homelessness**, racial and ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, English learners, and children and youth in foster care.

This brief provides specific strategies for, and examples of, directing ESSER funds for children and youth experiencing homelessness at the local level. State education agencies should promote these practices by including and prioritizing them in local educational agency (LEA) applications, guidance, and monitoring.

The law specifically states that ESSER II funds can be used for:

- Activities authorized by the McKinney-Vento Act
- Additional services to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, including outreach and service delivery.
- Mental health services and supports.
- Planning and implementing summer learning and after-school programs addressing the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

# How can schools and districts use ESSER II funds for students experiencing homelessness?

1. Increase liaison capacity for outreach, identification, and services, by augmenting their hours dedicated to McKinney-Vento duties and/or hiring additional staff.

- Use a <u>simple tool</u> to assess liaison capacity.

Center equity in ESSER II funds decisions. Black, Latinx, Native American and Pacific Islander students <u>are more likely to experience homelessness</u> than White students; LGBTQ students also are more likely to experience homelessness than heterosexual or cisgender students. Hire diverse outreach staff, translate all materials, and ensure cultural competence and sensitivity to the impacts of racism and trauma, as well as to the strengths of these populations, in outreach and service provision.

2. Provide academic coaching and in-person learning opportunities.

- Offer teachers extra paid hours to provide individual academic support to their students, to do weekly check-ins by text or other platforms outside of class, and provide weekly attendance certificates and other incentives to promote attendance.
- Provide small, socially-distanced on-site academic opportunities at school buildings and/or in the community. Confluence Academies Charter School in St. Louis, MO set up virtual academy centers in school buildings and the community soon after buildings closed, providing transportation, meals, and teachers to help with distance learning.
- Offer transportation to in-person learning opportunities.
- Tutoring specifically designed for remote and hybrid learners has shown <u>positive outcomes</u>.
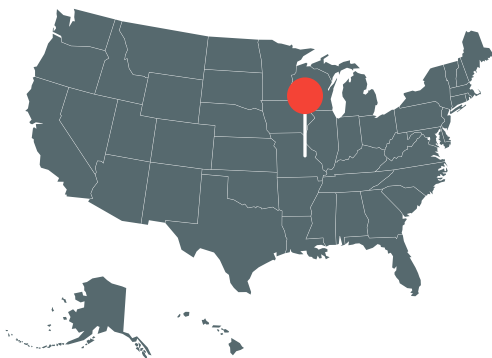
Confluence Academies Charter School in St. Louis, MO set up virtual academy centers in school buildings and the community soon after buildings closed, providing transportation, meals, and teachers to help with distance learning.

3. Offer <u>early childhood education services</u> for young children experiencing homelessness.
- Provide transportation to existing in-person options.
- Increase capacity in <u>preschool</u>, Head Start, and early intervention programs.

4. Enhance communication options with students and families.
- Provide prepaid cell phones for youth and parents. Kansas City Public Schools purchased phones with one and two year contracts for McKinney-Vento high school seniors.
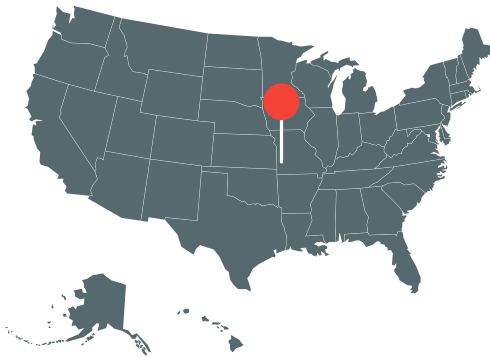
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- Facilitate "affinity groups" for students to connect on platforms they use.
- Send small care packages to students weekly or monthly to keep them engaged.
- Increase posters, <u>flyers</u>, and other outreach throughout the community.
- Purchase and staff a vehicle for community outreach to motels, campgrounds, food banks and doubled-up students. Paducah Public Schools in KY purchased a van with community donations, and the McKinney-Vento program has teamed up with school nutrition to provide school supplies, hygiene items and food.
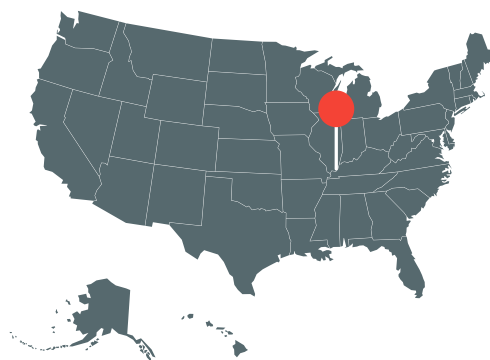
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5. Increase counseling and social work services by augmenting existing staff hours and/or hiring additional staff.
- Ensure <u>counselors</u> can assist McKinney-Vento students with <u>credit accrual</u> and recovery, <u>FAFSA completion</u>, and <u>college transition</u>.
- Help students and families meet basic needs like food, health care, masks, hygiene items, and laundry.

6. Make systems and processes more "McKinney-Vento friendly"
- Upgrade online enrollment systems to ensure they are fully and easily accessible to families and students experiencing homelessness. Consult our guide to <u>Removing Barriers to Online Enrollment</u>.
- Increase <u>professional development</u> to teachers, registrars, social workers, counselors, early childhood education staff, special education teams, and all school staff.

7. Help meet rising mental health needs.
- Screen for trauma, either in person or online. Simple, well-researched instruments include UCLA's <u>COVID-19 Screen for Child/Adolescent PTSD</u> and the <u>Structured Trauma-Related Experiences and Symptoms Screener</u>.
- Invite community mental health providers to support students virtually and/or on-site at schools.
- Implement trauma-informed training and practices available from the <u>National Child Traumatic Stress Network</u>, <u>ACES Aware</u>, or similar resources. A recent <u>review of programs with proven track records</u>, many of which offer free tools and free online training, can help schools get started.
- Adopt <u>positive school discipline practices</u> school- and district-wide.
- Center equity: Take extra steps to ensure students of color have access to mental health supports, as <u>research</u> has found them less likely to reach out to teachers or counselors for mental health assistance. Also, ensure mental health providers are LGBTQ+ positive and offer <u>online resources</u> sensitive to the challenges of LGBTQ+.