

District and State Support for Homeless Students During Ordered School-Building Closure

**Updated information appears in Red.
Document Updated on April 13, 2020**

At this particularly challenging time, Ohio's homeless students are among the most vulnerable and need our best efforts and dedicated commitment to support their needs. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Children and Youth Program ensures all homeless children and youth, including preschoolers, have equal access to the same free and appropriate public education as non-homeless children and youth. The Ohio Department of Education and districts receive McKinney-Vento funds to provide support and services to ensure homeless students receive an equitable education. The Department is repurposing McKinney-Vento funds and recommends districts provide additional support to homeless students during Ohio's ordered school-building closure.

This document encourages district and school leaders to consider the following three questions as they think through how best to provide services to homeless students. These considerations are designed to drive practical approaches that are sensitive to ensuring the health and safety of students, educators and the community:

1. Is the activity essential?
2. Can the activity be done virtually?
3. If there is no other choice, then can the activity be done safely? This means individuals are separated by distance, not congregating in close proximity and the health of participants (students, educators and others) is protected.

Consulting the local health department is advisable and encouraged.

Ohio Department of Education Repurposing of Funds: Below are actions the Department will take to address the immediate concerns for homeless students. These actions will be enabled through the Department's grant allocation process.

1. Allow districts to submit budget revisions to their current funding applications for both the formula Title I funds and competitive McKinney-Vento grants to address the additional flexibilities in spending their funds to support homeless students.
2. Reallocate unspent (swept) McKinney-Vento funds to provide additional financial support for current grantees. The amount of unspent funds for Fiscal Year 2020 is \$137,717.
3. Repurpose McKinney-Vento state activity funds to provide additional awards to McKinney-Vento subgrantees for increased support to homeless students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICTS: ALL DISTRICTS MUST SUPPORT THE EDUCATIONAL STABILITY OF HOMELESS STUDENTS PER THE FEDERAL MCKINNEY-VENTO LAW AND AS OUTLINED IN OHIO'S EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA) PLAN.

1. Consider increasing the amount of Title I funds set aside for supporting homeless students during the time school buildings are closed.

Rationale: Districts must set aside Title I funds to be used explicitly to support homeless students. Given the level of need of homeless students during the ordered school-building closure, districts are encouraged to exercise discretion to increase the amount of Title I funds set aside for homeless students. Allowable uses are extensive, but for the purpose of supporting students during the closure, allowable uses include:

Items of clothing;

- Personal and school supplies such as backpacks, notebooks, etc.;
- Food;
- Medical and dental services;
- Counseling services to address anxiety related to homelessness that is impeding learning;
- Outreach services to students living in shelters, hotels and other temporary residences;
- Parental involvement specifically oriented to reaching out to parents of homeless students.

2. Support the activities of homeless liaisons to provide additional assistance to homeless students and their families.

Rationale: Every district in the state is required to have a homeless liaison. Homeless liaisons' duties include identifying homeless students, educating the public on homeless rights and services, and connecting families with services. The homeless liaison can coordinate services for homeless students during this time, including food, shelter and health services. A main function of the liaison is to identify homeless students — as we expect an influx of housing instability during this time, the homeless liaison will be a critical resource in tracking and connecting with homeless families during and after the school-building closures.

Homeless liaisons may act as service coordinators for families experiencing homelessness. The following are examples of service coordination activities they can provide for their students:

- Coordinate for a local fire station to be a hub of resources for families;
- Coordinate for a family to pick up necessary hygiene and cleaning supplies at a United States Department of Agriculture meal distribution site;
- Coordinate with shelter providers and create a communication plan to serve students during and after Ohio's ordered school-building closure, including distribution of hygiene and cleaning products.

For more examples, review the resources below on ways districts can increase support for homeless students during Ohio's ordered school-building closure.

3. Provide information about homeless services and contact information for the district's homeless liaison at meal distribution sites.

Meal sites will be points of access for families and students. Districts can improve awareness of and access to services for homeless students by providing important service information at these sites. Ohio will not need a waiver or expressed flexibility from the U.S. Department of Education to complete this recommendation.

Homeless liaisons may communicate with homeless shelter staff members or designees to retrieve meals for multiple students experiencing homelessness from [food distribution sites](#) to minimize movement and exposure during the Stay at Home order due to COVID-19. Shelter providers must provide documentation, such as a letter on shelter/provider letterhead, requesting to pick up multiple meals and the number of meals to be picked up. The site/sponsor should retain a copy of this letter for its records.

Liaisons looking for more information about Ohio's local and regional homeless assistance systems (known as Continuums of Care, or CoCs) can reference a [spreadsheet](#) containing this information from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO). More information on how to support students and families experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis can be found on the [COHHIO website](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MCKINNEY-VENTO SUBGRANTEES

Ohio has funding from the U.S. Department of Education to award to subgrantees across the state to provide services and resources to homeless students. Ohio has 20 subgrantees with awards ranging from \$25,000 to \$400,000. Allowable uses of subgrantee funds are extensive, and funds will be increased due to the Ohio Department of Education repurposing McKinney-Vento State Activities funds (see above). **Subgrantees will be allowed to carry over their state Fiscal Year 2020 funds into state Fiscal Year 2021.** Subgrantees can increase their support and use funds for the following:

- Tutoring, supplemental instruction and other educational services that help homeless children and youths reach Ohio's Learning Standards.
- Referrals of eligible students to medical, dental, mental and other health services.
- Education and training for parents and guardians of homeless children and youths about the rights of and resources available to them and other activities designed to increase their meaningful involvement in the educational process.
- Coordination between schools and agencies providing services to homeless children and youths to expand and enhance such services.
- Providing supplies to non-school facilities serving eligible students and adapting these facilities to enable them to provide services.
- Providing school supplies, including those to be distributed at shelters, temporary housing facilities or other appropriate locations.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT HOMELESS STUDENTS

[Resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Homeless liaisons and other school personnel who support students and families experiencing homelessness will find helpful guidance and resources to support before, during and after an outbreak of COVID-19.

[Resources from the Schoolhouse Connection](#)

Strategies for safety, services and learning to support students and families experiencing homelessness.

[Resources from the National Center for Homeless Education](#)

Find up-to-date information from the federal government regarding services to support students and families experiencing homelessness.

[Resources from United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#)

What questions should districts be asking themselves when planning to support students and families experiencing homelessness during COVID-19 crisis? This resource is a good tool to get the conversation started.