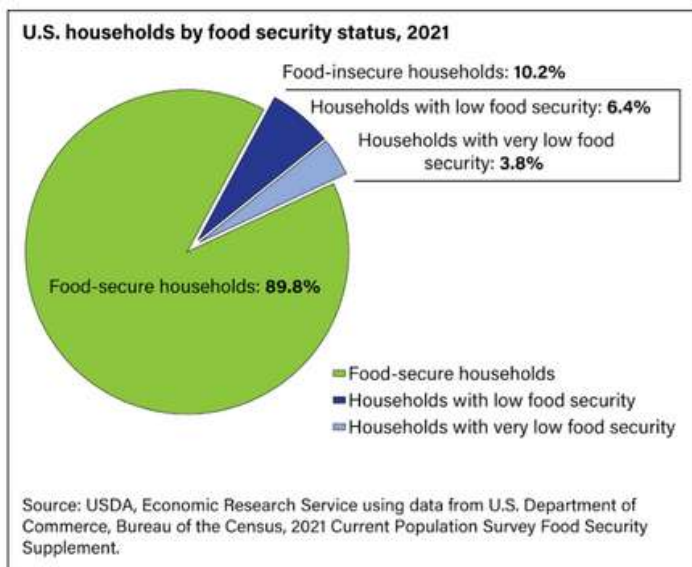


Ensuring Access to Food Resources for Students Experiencing Homelessness

According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), 10.2% (or 13.5 million) of households were food insecure at some point during 2021. These households were uncertain of having or were unable to acquire enough food for all members of the household due to financial hardship or lack of food resources. Families experiencing homelessness often face additional barriers to accessing food due to high mobility or lack of transportation. Homeless liaisons play an important role in ensuring that students have access to free school meals and referrals are made to provide the family access to food resources in the community.

Food Insecurity:

- Households with low food security: food insecurity characterized primarily by reductions in dietary quality and variety
- Households with very low food security: food insecure to the extent that eating patterns were disrupted (skipped meals) and food intake reduced because the household could not afford enough food



Accessing School Meals:

- The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act establishes that certain children, including those who are homeless or runaway youth, are categorically eligible for free meal benefits under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. These students and their families do not have to complete an application for free meals. Rather, USDA policies allow for automatic enrollment of these students, which is known as “direct certification,” to ensure they receive meals quickly.
- Once a child is certified as eligible to receive free school meals, eligibility remains in effect for the duration of the current school year and for up to 30 days after the first operating day of the subsequent school year or until a new eligibility determination is made in the new school year, whichever comes first.
- USDA policy permits liaisons and shelter directors to obtain free school meals for students by providing a list of names with effective dates.
- It is the homeless liaison’s role to ensure that school nutrition staff are notified when a student is identified under McKinney-Vento so free meals can begin immediately.
- Notifying nutrition staff through email is allowable and many district liaisons or building points of contact communicate via email when students are identified.

Best Practices and Strategies at the School District Level

From: Christi DeChamps, Former McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison in Appleton Area School District, WI; Current Social Work Consultant in CESA 6, WI



Food Support / Basic Needs

- Food Access - immediate needs:
 - Offer a “Free Little Pantry” at the school office stocked with non-perishable food items donated by local food pantries. Families can take what they need.
 - Seek community donations from church, volunteer, student service groups. Consider projects like Food Bags (pre-packaged gallon zip lock bags filled with snacks and microwavable food items for grab & go needs and hotel living) or assemble “birthday boxes” (disposable cake pan packaged with a cake mix box, can of soda (for wet ingredient substitution), frosting, candles, etc).



Link to Community Resources

- School District McKinney-Vento Website:
 - Enhance the purpose & function of the school MKV website to include links to community resources and programs. [Here's an example.](#)
 - Add a QR code to your McKinney-Vento outreach materials that links to the district’s McKinney-Vento website to access resources.
- Resource Guide and Folders:
 - Provide printed materials in a McKinney-Vento resource folder with printed flyers and community resource brochures.
 - Research Local Resources to supply families with enough information to be immediately helpful (hours, address, how to access - registering as a client, walk-in, drive-up, etc.)



Assess Universal Food Supports

- Know what resources are available in your school district for all students (weekend food backpack support, children’s Summer Meal Programs, community meals, walk-up pantries, etc.)
- Know what local agencies help with applications for assistance programs (FoodShare EBT)



Use Technology

- School district cell phones can save you time and create easy resource sharing tools.
 - Use the NOTES feature on iPhone to create a template message.
 - Text template message to any parent who expresses a need for a certain resource such as food. Texts can contain basic information and live links to community agency websites.
 - If a district cell phone isn’t available, consider adding a Google number to your personal phone.



Become Familiar with Federal/State/County Resources

- Homeless liaison can be a “go-to” for families and staff about how to access county and state assistance.
 - Know what is available, who is eligible, how to apply, time sensitive changes, and what agencies can assist with the application/enrollment process.

Accessing Food Resources During the Summer Months

From: Kelsey Boone, Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst, Food Research & Action Center, kboone@frac.org

Summer EBT

A permanent, nationwide Summer EBT program was established in December of 2022 through the Consolidated Appropriations Act. The program begins in the Summer of 2024 and continues in subsequent years. All states and territories who run a nutrition assistance program, as well as Tribal organizations that participate in the Women, Infants, and Children program can participate.

Program structure

- Families will receive \$40 a month per eligible child (this amount will be adjusted based on inflation in 2024 and beyond).
- All states will run the program under the SNAP program or the nutrition assistance program in territories, tribal organizations will run the program under a WIC model.
- States must issue benefits using automatic issuance for eligible children and must provide an application for those who were not certified during the school year.
- Those students who are categorically eligible and directly certified for school meals will automatically receive benefits, this means that all students who are identified as facing homelessness should be automatically issued benefits.



Best Practices to Distribute Benefits

- Work with McKinney-Vento district homeless liaisons to share information on Summer EBT with the district’s homeless families and youth. Resources should include information on the program, how to update addresses, and how to get replacement cards if their card was sent to the wrong address.
- Allow McKinney-Vento district homeless liaisons to deliver Summer EBT cards to students and families if an address is not readily available.
- Issue Summer EBT cards in the student’s name to ensure unaccompanied youth have access to Summer EBT benefits.
- Create an easy way for families and youth to update address information or allow them to request that the card be delivered to the school district.
- Share information about the program with homeless youth via email, text, and social media.

Summer Meals

- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally-funded, state-administered program where sponsors set up sites where children can receive free meals in the summer.
- Children 18 years and younger may receive free meals and snacks through SFSP.
- At most sites, children receive either one or two meals each day. Certain camps and sites may be approved to serve up to three meals to each child, each day.
- Find a meal service site near where you live by using USDA's Summer Meals Site Finder. You may also text "Summer Meals" to 914-342-7744. or call 1-866-348-6479 to find a site near you.

The Benefit of Summer Meals

- Ensures children receive the nutrition they need when the school year ends
- Many summer meal sites provide educational, enrichment or recreational activities that keep children learning, active and safe when school is not in session.
- Allows program providers to stretch their budgets and for sponsors to strengthen their overall operations by operating year-round

