

## **ESSA Plans: Best Practices for Ensuring Homeless Student Access to School, Afterschool, and Summer Nutrition Programs**

### **Basics**

The Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) program, authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act), was created to ensure homeless students have educational rights and protections.<sup>1</sup> State Education Agencies (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEA) must review and revise their current policies and procedures to safeguard homeless students' access to high-quality education as part of drafting their [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) plans.

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children as those living in families who are sharing housing with other families; living in motels or camp grounds, due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; awaiting foster care placement; and living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.

ESSA state plans must describe how SEA funding will be used to provide support to LEAs and how LEAs will serve homeless students to ensure they are properly identified and have access to a high-quality education in coordination with the services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act.<sup>2</sup> Title VII-B, as amended by ESSA, describes the procedures for ensuring that homeless children and youths do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including the school nutrition programs (Section 722(g)(1)(F)(ii-iii)).<sup>3</sup> Students that meet the aforementioned definition of homelessness are categorically eligible for free school meals, which help to ensure homeless students have the nutrition they need to succeed academically.

As states draft plans that detail how they will ensure homeless students are properly identified and certified for free school meals, some include minimal language stating that all homeless students are able to participate in federal, state, and local nutrition programs, while others include more comprehensive language that will better ensure homeless students can access the federal nutrition programs in and out of school.

### **Best Practices**

State plans that include comprehensive language linking homeless students with nutritious meals at school, after school, on weekends, and during the summer take a stronger approach to supporting their homeless students' educational achievement and well-being. States that are still developing their plans can incorporate known best practices to ensure that their homeless students are not hungry and are ready to learn.

- LEAs should directly certify homeless students for free school meals. Direct certification ensures that homeless students are properly identified to receive free school meals without a school meals application. A number of state plans direct the homeless liaison, or other LEA professional who works with homeless students, to collaborate with their school nutrition

department to ensure all homeless students receive free meals through federal child nutrition programs. This approach also increases the total percentage of students who are certified for free school meals, making community eligibility a more viable option for some schools. Community eligibility allows high-needs schools to offer school meals at no cost to all students and dramatically increases student participation in school breakfast and lunch.

- Connecticut’s plan describes the strategies it uses to ensure homeless students have access to the child nutrition programs throughout the year and can provide a model for other states. The plan highlights community eligibility and discusses providing training and guidance to LEAs to ensure homeless students are certified for free school meals. It notes that school districts conduct outreach for the Summer Food Service Program to ensure that homeless students have access to “out-of-school” meals and that homeless shelters serving families with children participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Massachusetts’ plan highlights school meals as one of the non-academic ways schools can support homeless students and their families. The plan suggests strategies for LEAs to ensure that students have access to the healthy food they need, such as serving breakfast in the classroom and providing dinner. The plan highlights the state child nutrition agency’s work with partners to develop summer meals sites at hotels serving as shelters, resulting in more than 1,000 homeless children receiving over 10,000 summer meals in 2016.
- Nevada’s plan highlights that homeless students are eligible for federal, state, or local food programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, and the Summer Food Service Program. Further, it highlights the importance and availability of CACFP, which provides reimbursement to homeless shelters to feed children. Nevada’s SEA will distribute FRAC’s brochure, *Wondering How to Feed the Children in Your Homeless or Domestic Violence Shelter?* to each LEA homeless liaison so they can inform their local shelters and community of this available program.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program Non-Regulatory Guidance*. Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf>. Accessed on July 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. (2016). *Summary of Major Amendments on Homelessness and Foster Care in “The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.”* Available at: <http://www.naehcy.org/sites/default/files/dl/legis/NofootnoteSUMMARYJuly16.pdf>. Accessed on July 13, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government. (2016). McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program. Available at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2016-06073/p-21>. Accessed on July 13, 2017.