



Meeting the Transportation Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

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The [McKinney-Vento Act](#) provides educational protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness, including transportation requirements to provide school stability. The Act also requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to remove barriers to the identification and enrollment of students experiencing homelessness, including transportation barriers. (For a list of FAQs related to transportation, including legal citations, see [SchoolHouse Connection's Q&A from the Field](#).) School districts and charter schools are finding innovative ways to ensure that students experiencing homelessness receive the transportation services to which they are entitled, and which are essential to their school enrollment, attendance, and success.

SchoolHouse Connection has compiled the following considerations, strategies, and examples for school district liaisons, transportation coordinators, and others working to support students experiencing homelessness.

We will update this living document with additional strategies and examples that emerge from best practice and federal guidance.

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Addressing Driver Shortages

The first and safest option for transporting McKinney-Vento students is a school bus, including adjusting routes for regular, special education, magnet, and other school buses. However, the nationwide driver shortage has caused serious problems in school busing, with an outsized impact on students experiencing homelessness. Students who are homeless often experience frequent or unanticipated changes in living situations, including moving across district boundaries or state lines. They may be chronically absent due to sudden moves, caring for younger family members, or needing to leave shelters early in the morning. As a result of driver shortages, it can be difficult for school district and charter school transportation departments to accommodate last minute changes or route adjustments, often causing students to miss part or all of a school day.

The following strategies may be appropriate for ensuring adequate drivers to meet the unique transportation needs of McKinney-Vento students.

Reimbursing Families or Youth for Transportation



Some families and youth experiencing homelessness have their own cars. It is important to reimburse families and/or youth for all transportation expenses incurred getting to and from school, both at the start and end of the school day (i.e. two round trips). In addition to round trip transportation costs, reimbursement can be provided for toll roads, some car repairs, and fuel/mileage for a student's extracurricular activity participation. Families and youth experiencing homelessness may not have money for gas or other transportation expenses while waiting for reimbursement; therefore, it is important to provide gas cards up front. Many gas stations offer fuel-only cards, which cannot be used for any other purchases. Schools can monitor attendance to ensure that students are attending, and adjust future reimbursements accordingly. While the amount of reimbursement is at the discretion of the district or charter school, it should be comparable to transportation reimbursement provided to staff. LEAs may choose to use the federal mileage rate, a specific calculation based on mileage and the cost of gas, or other reimbursement formula.

From the Field:

- White Mountains Regional School District in New Hampshire serves 1,108 total students, 31 of whom are experiencing homelessness (during the 2019-2020 school year). There is no public transportation, so the school district reimburses families for fuel costs.
- In Virginia, Alaska, and other states, school districts have approved the use of funds to pay for car repairs when the car is the student's only means of transportation to and from school.
- Some school districts in New Jersey reimburse families for the cost of tolls if their route requires them to drive on the turnpike.
- In Wisconsin, some districts use gas cards for families who are highly mobile, using the standard federal mileage rate. Mileage is calculated round trip and gas cards are delivered via the building social worker at the time of drop off on Monday morning. This provides an opportunity for the social worker to check in with the family, as well as providing gas cards up front for the week. The social worker will monitor the student's attendance and continue to check in with the parent about where they are staying and if gas cards are still the best mode of transportation to ensure attendance. (See some sample calculations on [the website of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#).)

Hiring Drivers, Rideshare Services, and Private Drivers, and Purchasing Dedicated Vehicles for McKinney-Vento students



Depending upon availability and LEA policy, school districts and charter schools may be able to use rideshare services like Zum; Uber; Lyft; Hop, Skip, Drive; on-demand taxis; or other local services that can respond quickly and flexibly to highly mobile students. Some LEAs are offering taxi companies incentives (such as higher rates and “no-show” payments) to retain drivers. It is important to review school district or charter school policy before offering these services, including driver background checking policies. Some LEAs limit Uber/Lyft to students who are over the age of 16, and/or who have a parent who is required to ride along. If parents do ride along, return transportation should be provided back to where they are staying.

Some LEAs contract directly with private drivers to provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness. Others are growing the roster of bus drivers through creative means to help maintain or increase the number and distance of routes that are needed to provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness.

From the Field:

- The U.S. Department of Education has [clarified](#) that LEAs may use Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief (ESSER) or Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funds for “retention bonuses for current bus drivers, for salary increases, or for the cost of hiring additional bus drivers to address the shortage of bus drivers due to the pandemic. Similarly, if an LEA is operating more bus routes due to physical distancing, funds may be used to hire additional bus drivers. In addition, funds may be used to pay for the costs associated with obtaining a commercial driver’s license for new bus drivers, including the required training.” In Nevada, for example, school districts have used ESSER funds to provide recruitment and retention bonuses for bus drivers.
- In Janesville, Wisconsin, private drivers are paid directly by the school district to provide district transportation for morning, midmorning, and afternoon services. Janesville completes background checks for each driver at the time of hire. Drivers must pass a physical examination completed by his or her own physician at the Driver’s expense. The vehicle or vehicles to be used to transport must pass a vehicle inspection which is covered by the district. The driver must have proof of insurance on their vehicle as well. The driver’s insurance is primary in the event of an accident and the district’s liability insurance is second for coverage in the event of an accident. Passenger and route information is coordinated by the district. Drivers are paid an hourly rate of \$38.54 and receive the federal reimbursement mileage rate for the use of their own vehicle to transport.
- Minneapolis Public Schools has established an “on-demand” relationship with a local taxi company, so the liaison can order a taxi immediately when a student moves. These on-demand taxis cost more than the regular cab routes the district has established for McKinney-Vento students, which typically take several days to reroute.
- Monongalia County Schools in West Virginia purchased three small school buses specifically to transport McKinney-Vento students. Currently, they are on a waitlist for a fourth bus. Their drivers receive specific training on homelessness, trauma, and procedures for McKinney-Vento student transportation.

Transportation Partnerships with Community-Based Organizations



Community-based organizations can play a unique and valuable role when partnering with school districts and charter schools to provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness. They can provide short- or long-term funding and other resources to fill shortfalls and to help create a sustainable system of transportation.

Government agencies and organizations that provide medical transportation also can be excellent partners to provide transportation to school.

From the Field:

- The School District of La Crosse, Wisconsin is partnering with community agencies like Boys and Girls Club and the local YMCA to help with transportation for students experiencing homelessness. Those community partners supply the staff and vehicles (mostly vans) to transport students.
- The Steve Smith Family Foundation partnered with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools in North Carolina to provide a space during the day where students could come to do their schoolwork during remote learning, as well as transportation to and from the work space.

Additional Creative Ideas



School districts and charter schools are working with their leadership to implement creative solutions, such as helping provide carpools, walking groups, and bicycles.

- School districts in Colorado and Alaska are connecting McKinney-Vento families who have cars to families without cars who live in the same area and whose children attend the same schools. They offer the family with the car extra funding to drive students from the other family to school.
- Spokane Public Schools has launched “walking school buses.” The district partners with a local faith community or nonprofit organization to recruit volunteers (all background-checked) to walk to and from school with groups of students for safety. Many volunteers even coordinate enrichment activities the students do during the work.
- Cherry Creek School District in Colorado worked with the district’s Innovation Campus (college and career preparedness center) to have high school students refurbish used bicycles and then provide them to McKinney-Vento students for school transportation.
- New Philadelphia City Schools in Ohio used ARP-HCY funds to purchase bicycles specifically for immigrant students within the district’s walk zone.

Transportation Considerations for Large Urban School Districts



School districts in metropolitan areas may rely upon public transportation for students experiencing homelessness, providing free bus and train passes. It is important to work with public transit authorities to ensure that students experiencing homelessness have seamless access to bus, train, or other modes of transportation for which a pass would otherwise be required. Districts may consider partnering with public transportation so that students may use school IDs to utilize transportation in lieu of specific transportation passes. Consistent with state and local laws and ordinances, school districts should provide students experiencing homelessness with personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks, face shields, or sanitizer, that may be required to utilize public transportation.

From the Field:

- Chicago Public Schools makes bus passes available for pick-up at any school location in the district (not just the school of origin). This helps to ensure students have a transportation option in place on the first day of school, rather than worrying about how they will get to their school of origin to pick-up their bus pass. They also work with the Chicago Transit Authority to train drivers to assist students who are experiencing homelessness, particularly younger students, and who use a special pass to ride the bus or train.
- The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) heard feedback from families experiencing homelessness who were staying in shelters that the route from their shelter to school was dangerous to walk because it required crossing over a busy highway. In response, DCPS is piloting a program that gives these families more flexible transportation options, including a combination of bus and metro passes, as well as fuel reimbursement.
- In Detroit Public Schools Community District, schools utilize a variety of options based on student need. Covenant House Academy provides bus cards for students, and Cesar Chavez Academy provides gas cards, taxis and bus cards on an as-needed basis.
- The Hawaii Department of Education was able to establish an institutional account with their public transit system, allowing student bus passes to be automatically reloaded. The Department of Education is invoiced for the cost, eliminating any wait time for reimbursement.

Transportation Considerations for Rural School Districts



Rural school districts face their own unique transportation challenges. Many rural districts lack access to public transportation and have limited access to taxis or other rideshare services. In addition, travel time between districts may be longer for students who are receiving transportation to a school of origin. It is important to remember that the McKinney-Vento Act does not place time or distance limits on transportation to and from the school of origin. Rural districts may need to consider more creative approaches to transportation.

From the Field:

- In Wisconsin, some rural school districts partner with farmers to provide transportation. Since the farming season ends by the time the school year begins, farmers with Commercial Drivers License credentials are qualified to drive school buses without the need for additional training.
- Districts can form transportation consortia with neighboring districts. By pooling resources regionally and communicating about student needs, they can maximize resources to serve more students experiencing homelessness
- Districts may consider transporting students to the school district's boundary, where they meet the neighboring district's transportation service.
- Districts also can consider transportation arrangements where one district transports to school and another district transports back home after school. .

Setting Up Transportation at the Start of the School Year and Mid-Year Reviews



If school districts and charter schools wait until the beginning of the school year to set up transportation for students experiencing homelessness, these students risk missing the critical first few days of class. It is important to identify students and set up transportation schedules over the summer in the weeks before the start of the school year, and to add a mid-year transportation review for students who are identified as homeless after the start of the school year.

From the Field:

- Minneapolis Public Schools social workers are responsible for supporting students experiencing homelessness, including transportation needs. In order to ensure that each student who needed transportation had access to it on the first day of school, MPS used federal relief funds (American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth I) to pay their social workers extra in return for coming back a few weeks early over the summer. During this time, social workers identified and arranged transportation for approximately 90 more students experiencing homelessness than the previous year. They were able to ensure that instead of 7 students with transportation on the first day of school, As a result, 100 students experiencing homelessness had access to transportation and were ready for the first day of the school year in 2021-2022, a thirteen-fold increase over the previous year.

Transportation for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness Enrolled in Early Childhood Programs



Families experiencing homelessness with young children (age 6 and under) face multiple challenges getting to and from early childhood programs. The McKinney-Vento Act applies to preschool programs administered by the LEA, including Head Start programs that are administered by LEAs; therefore, LEA-administered preschool programs have an obligation to comply with the transportation requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act (to see if a program is considered a preschool program under the McKinney-Vento Act, see [this chart](#).)

From the Field:

- In many communities, early childhood programs (Head Start, child care, pre-k) partner with community-based organizations in order to provide transportation for young children to and from their program. For example, Early Head Start in Texas Region 10 partners with a local church to provide transportation. They also use their grant funds to provide bus transportation for children.
- School districts that are located near a college or university have formed partnerships with the campus transit system to provide transportation for college students and young children experiencing homelessness. Kennesaw State University in Georgia offers their campus shuttle buses to students experiencing homelessness with young children, so they can transport them to child care. This is a particularly useful option if there is a campus-based child care center in the school district.
- Other community-based organizations might be able to help transport young children experiencing homelessness, such as faith-based organizations, local non-profits, etc. For example, one school district in Wisconsin partners with their local Boys and Girls Club to use their vehicles. Boys and Girls Clubs provide drivers and are able to transport early learners to district-administered preschool programs.

Funding for Transportation for Students Experiencing Homelessness



The McKinney-Vento Act's transportation requirements apply to all LEAs, including those that do not receive subgrants through the McKinney-Vento Act and those that do not receive Title I Part A funding. The Act requires that districts and charter schools agree upon a method to apportion the cost and share the responsibility. If no other agreement exists, LEAs must split the cost equally. Homeless liaisons should work together to determine the best and most cost effective transportation, which may be to utilize existing transportation in the district of residence. Homeless liaisons should communicate with liaisons in the sharing district or school before sending a bill for shared costs.

The chart below summarizes transportation needs of students experiencing homelessness, and funding sources that are permitted to be used to meet those needs.

Transportation Need	Title I Part A (Note: <u>all LEAs must reserve Title I Part A funds to serve homeless students</u>)	ESSER (See <u>FAQs from the US Department of Education regarding using ESSER funds for transportation.</u>)	American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Funds (See <u>federal guidance on use of funds</u>)	McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth Funds	State and Local Funds
Bus service to and from school (i.e. regular transportation offered to all children and youth)		X (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time, and the cost is reasonable and necessary)			X

Bus service to and from the school of origin	☒		☒	☒	☒
Gas cards or reimbursement to families	☒	☒ (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time) and the cost is reasonable and necessary.)	☒	☒	Depends on LEA policy
Cost of providing public transit passes (bus, train)	☒	☒ (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time) and the cost is reasonable and necessary.)	☒	☒	☒
Taxi or rideshare (Zum, Uber, Lyft, etc.)	☒	☒ (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time) and the cost is reasonable and necessary.)	☒	☒	Depends on LEA policy

Extracurricular activities (tutoring, athletic practice, etc.)	X	X (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time) and the cost is reasonable and necessary.)	X	X	Depends on LEA policy
Cost of attending school-sponsored field trips and college visits			X	X	Depends on LEA policy
To a work study program, internship, etc.					Depends on LEA policy
Cost of transporting parents of young children/students who must accompany their child to school	X	X (As long as the need is related to COVID-19; e.g., to support daily attendance at school to address the impact of lost instructional time) and the cost is reasonable and necessary.)	X	X	X
Car repairs for a family or youth experiencing homelessness when the car is the student's only mode of transportation to and from school			X	X	Depends on LEA policy

Purchasing a vehicle for transporting students experiencing homelessness		X	X	X	Depends on LEA policy
Hiring a district or regional transportation coordinator for students experiencing homelessness	X	X	X	X	X

Using American Rescue Plan Act Funds for Transportation

As noted in the chart above, both American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Education Relief (ARP ESSER) and the American Rescue Plan Act - Homeless Children and Youth Funds (ARP-HCY funds) may be used to provide some transportation services. [Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education](#) on ARP-HCY funds includes “providing transportation to and from the school of origin, or to attend classes and participate fully in school activities.” This may include the purchase of vehicles for the specialized transportation of homeless children and youth, as well as reimbursing parents and youth for gas costs, purchasing prepaid gas cards, and paying for limited car repairs, if such costs are reasonable and necessary. ARP-HCY funds, like McKinney-Vento funds, should be used only for excess costs of transportation (those greater than what is provided for housed students and not funded through other federal, state, or local funds). For more considerations and ideas for using ARP-HCY funds for vehicles or car repairs, see SchoolHouse Connection’s [Using ARP-HCY to Purchase a Vehicle with ARP-HCY: Benefits and Considerations](#) and [Maximize Final ARP-HCY Funds: Quick Spending and Cost Guide](#).

Have you Reviewed and Revised Your LEA Transportation Policies and Practices for Inclusion and Safety?

The McKinney-Vento Act requires SEAs and LEAs to develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention of homeless students in school¹.

It also requires LEAs to provide transportation to the school of origin at the request of a parent or guardian or, for unaccompanied youth, at the McKinney-Vento liaison's request.² Transportation services must be based on the individualized and student-centered best interest determinations, not on blanket mileage or time limits³. The federal law supersedes any contrary state or local policies. Applying local policies that establish blanket limits on transportation to students experiencing homelessness would violate the McKinney-Vento Act.

Transportation or lack of transportation must not create a barrier for student attendance.⁴ For example, if it is commonly known that students experiencing homelessness are transported via taxi, this may create a barrier for the student who feels stigmatized or singled out. In addition, there may be reasons why students experiencing homelessness may need to be provided transportation even though they live within the district's walk zone. These instances should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

School districts and charter schools should take precautions, including through transportation, to ensure the safety of students experiencing homelessness who are staying in domestic violence shelters or transitional housing programs. Ensuring door-to-door bus service (or other mode of transportation) may be critical to protect their safety. These determinations should be made on a case-by-case basis, depending upon the student's situation.

Additional Resources:

- [Ohio Department of Education Driver Shortage Playbook](#)
- [NCHE Transporting Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [NCHE Transportation for Homeless Children and Youth: Strategies for Rural School Districts](#)
- [Wisconsin Dept of Public Instruction Sample Transportation Agreements](#)
- [Illinois Regional Office of Education #26 Training for School Bus Drivers and Transportation Directors](#)
- [Indiana Transportation FAQ](#)

¹ 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(I).

² 42 USC 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii)

³ 42 USC 11432(g)(3)(A)

⁴ 42 U.S.C. §§11432(g)(1)(I), (g)(7)