



## FAQ on COVID-19 and Homelessness

Updated March 30, 2020

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### **McKinney-Vento Implementation and Outreach**

- 1. Are we required or able to make McKinney-Vento eligibility determinations during this time? We have received a few requests.**

Yes. The McKinney-Vento Act is still fully in effect. The way in which the law is implemented must change, of course, but the law is in effect. It is more important than ever to continue with identification efforts. We expect many new families and youth to fall into homelessness due to the economic crisis, with many urgent needs. In addition, it is possible that some supplemental funding might be based on the number of homeless students identified. Therefore, identifying your newly homeless students is imperative at this time.

- 2. How do we enroll students when school is closed? We will be able to contact our existing students/families, but with schools no longer enrolling new students, how are we supposed to assist students that are now losing housing and coming from other counties or other states?**

Schools must enroll McKinney-Vento students immediately, even during this pandemic. 42 USC 11432(g)(3)(C). Enrollment means “attending classes and participating fully in school activities.” 42 USC 11434a(1). If the school is offering no services or activities whatsoever to any students

at this time, then students experiencing homelessness also would not receive services at this time. In that context, enrollment may mean simply entering the student into the school database, with a flag or other identification as McKinney-Vento eligible. However, most schools are offering meals and some form of virtual instruction or optional virtual learning. That means students experiencing homelessness need to be enrolled immediately, so they can participate immediately in any and all activities the school is offering at this time—school meals, virtual classes, social work services outreach, etc.

If there is no distance learning in the LEA, the school/district still should complete the identification and code the students as McKinney-Vento in whatever data system is in use. This will be important in the event the LEA begins distance learning, offering services, and/or when schools re-open.

Many schools and districts use on-line enrollment systems. If those are not active at this time of year, it probably would be helpful to activate those now, to provide on-line enrollment capacity for students newly relocating to the district, including McKinney-Vento students.

**3. Are we still required to make best interest determinations if parents or youth wish to change to the local school, or if they move and want to remain in their school of origin?**

Yes. The McKinney-Vento Act is fully in force, including the right to enroll immediately “in any public school that nonhomeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend” or remain in their school of origin, according to the student’s best interest. The presumption in favor of the school of origin, and the priority given to the wishes of the parent or unaccompanied youth, also remain in effect. 42 USC 11432(g)(3)(A)-(B). In determining a student’s best interest, the impact of school closures and limited personnel certainly can be considered. Changing schools at this time may increase the likelihood of the student falling behind academically or missing out on services.

However, we have heard reports of increased mobility among students experiencing homelessness, due to motels imposing stay limits, campgrounds and parks closing, and shared housing arrangements falling apart under the increased stress of close quarters and fear of virus transmission. For many students who move, there may be important reasons to change to their local school. Better access to school meals may be one consideration. In short, the school of enrollment must depend on the student’s best interest.

**4. How are school districts connecting with children, youth and families?**

- Bethel School District in Pierce County, WA: “Our counselors and Social Workers are connecting with students in regards to education and basic needs. They are looping us in and we are supporting on the basic needs side as much as possible!”
- San Antonio ISD, TX: “Social workers will be calling all the McKinney-Vento families to find out their current situation. Also, a needs survey was sent out via our webpage. We added a question to identify newly doubled-up students, so we can do outreach based on this self-identification.”
- Nashville, TN: “We are struggling to obtain accurate and current contact numbers, but once we have those we are going to do a call out with resources. Our district is posting information on their Facebook page, but I'm just not sure our families and unaccompanied youth are looking there for help. In the future, I plan to have a crisis plan in place and announced at the start of the year, during the identification process, so we have a plan in place.”
- Phoenix, AZ: “This is a good time to send out posters, flyers, brochures, etc. with information about the McKinney-Vento program to campgrounds, motels, and other areas where families and youth might seek shelters. Ask those places to post the information.”
- Eau Claire Area School District, WI: “For communication, we've created a Facebook profile for our homeless program and are connecting through Facebook messenger. We're also texting and emailing families and students, and asking families to give us numbers of people they're staying with, if possible.”
- Maslow Project, southern OR: “I am using Facebook to connect with McKinney-Vento students and families. Also buying pay as you go phones.”
- Dallas, TX: “We are updating our website with as much information as possible, including food pantry information, in order to educate homeless families.”

## **5. How are school districts and charter schools staying connected with each other?**

Northern KY: “We’ve been meeting regionally for years, which makes it easier for us to pass along information and stay in touch now, since we already have relationships built between districts.”

Virginia: “[The State Coordinator] sent an email to all liaisons. They hit reply all and shared their processes and how to find out what was going on in their communities. Liaisons with families in those areas could make sure the info was shared.”

ESC Region 14, TX: “We have zooms set up for our liaisons to connect and share out strategies and challenges.”

South FL tri-county District Liaisons also are meeting by zoom.

**6. What are some ideas for districts if they do not have access to a work phone/office phone for connecting with their families, without using their personal phones?**

- Use Google Voice or a Skype number.
- Forward your work phone if you can.
- Enter \*67 to block your number.

**7. Is it appropriate for a liaison to use a group text message to reach unaccompanied youth?**

Privacy laws are still in full effect, so all communications should be careful not to share personally identifiable information and to protect the privacy and safety of all students. Therefore, group text messages or emails should only be used if you are able to hide the numbers or emails from other recipients.

**8. Can we share names with campgrounds to help us locate families to deliver meals? The campgrounds have a database and can tell us where families are staying now.**

Privacy laws are still in full effect, so all communications should be careful not to share personally identifiable information and to protect the privacy and safety of all students. The Department of Education has come out with [guidance](#) about privacy in the context of COVID-19. Providing a list of names to a campground, motel, or other third party is not allowable without parental consent. However, you could ask campgrounds/motels to give you the number of school-age children, or unaccompanied youth, staying at the campground or motel, and you could go to the campground or motel with that number of meals. This would be a good way to connect with those families and youth, and provide information about distance learning and/or other available services. You also could ask motels and campgrounds to post information about educational services and resources, McKinney-Vento rights, and local contact information.

**9. Can we use group texts, or apps like Remind, to reach our students, if those methods allow all recipients to see the names and contact information of students/families?**

Privacy laws are still in full effect, so all communications should be careful not to share personally identifiable information and to protect the privacy and safety of all students. You may be able to protect names in group texts, so numbers appear without associated names. Or, you can just send multiple individuals texts (time consuming, but the safest). Remind can be set so no student sees other students' names. It can be used just as an announcement forum for notices.

## **Funding and Use of Funds**

### **1. Can we use McKinney-Vento funds, or Title I, Part A homeless set-aside funds, to pay for internet connections for students experiencing homelessness?**

Yes. With schools closed and students engaged in distance learning (whether optional or required), internet connectivity is essential. Schools are purchasing mobile hotspots and/or helping families and youth obtain internet connections where their living situation is stable enough.

In terms of McKinney-Vento funds, internet connectivity in the current circumstances falls under two allowable uses of funds in 42 USC 11433(d):

"(7) The provision of services and assistance to attract, engage, and retain homeless children and youths, particularly homeless children and youths who are not enrolled in school, in public school programs and services provided to nonhomeless children and youths."

and

"(16) The provision of other extraordinary or emergency assistance needed to enable homeless children and youths to attend school and participate fully in school activities."

In terms of Title IA set-aside funds, the internet connection falls well within ED's [guidance](#):

"First, the services must be reasonable and necessary to assist homeless students to take advantage of educational opportunities. (ESEA section 1113(c)(3)(A); 2 CFR § 200.403(a)). Second, Title I, Part A funds must be used only as a last resort when funds or services are not available from other public or private sources."

Internet connectivity is absolutely necessary for students to take advantage of educational opportunities at this time. If a company in your area is offering free internet, and your homeless students are able to access that service, then you should not use Title IA funds to pay for internet. However, often, students will need to pay a connection fee or some monthly fee for internet, which they are unable to afford. No other resources are reasonably available.

### **2. We are working with districts to provide hotspots through Title 1 and community resources before tapping McKinney-Vento funds for them - does that make sense?**

Yes, absolutely. McKinney-Vento students are Title I students, and they should be served through Title I funding. If the district or school is providing internet to low-income students with Title IA funds, McKinney-Vento students also should get internet with Title IA funds. With school closures, many schools and districts are providing hotspots and devices to all students or to all low-income students. McKinney-Vento students must have access to those resources. McKinney-Vento funding is intended to be the "sprinkles" on top of the icing (Title I) on top of the cake (general education). In fact, the law is clear that: "Services provided under this section

shall not replace the regular academic program and shall be designed to expand upon or improve services provided as part of the school's regular academic program.” 42 USC 11433(a)(3). McKinney-Vento funds cannot be used for hotspots or devices that the district is providing to all students.

**3. Some internet companies are offering free service right now, but not to families that have an outstanding bill. Can McKinney-Vento funds be used to pay those bills?**

With schools closed and students engaged in distance learning (whether optional or required), internet connectivity is essential. Using public funds to pay a past due utility balance generally is not allowable. It is advisable to seek other ways to provide connectivity, such as providing a mobile hotspot. Mobile hotspots meet the current obligation to ensure “enrollment” for McKinney-Vento students (which includes full participation in school activities), without stretching the allowable uses of funds. If, for some particular reason, there is absolutely no way for a student to get online, other than to pay an outstanding bill so they can connect to a local internet company, then it may be appropriate to pay that bill, given school closures.

**4. Are pre-paid cell phones an approved use of Title 1 funds?**

In this time of virtual learning, electronic devices are absolutely necessary for students to take advantage of educational opportunities. Students must have appropriate devices to complete assignments and participate fully in the school activities being offered. A pre-paid cell phone may be one device that can allow students to participate fully in school. The pre-paid cell phone also may provide internet connectivity for students to stay connected to virtual learning. If the cell phone is “reasonable and necessary to assist homeless students to take advantage of educational opportunities,” and if there are not other sources of devices or connectivity (for example, if your school is giving all students mobile hotspots and Chromebooks), then using Title IA funds, for a pre-paid cell phone probably falls within ED’s [guidance](#).

The Community Partnership Charter School in New York City has purchased pre-paid phones for their students in transitional housing and find that they are working well for access to digital instruction.

**5. Can we purchase Chromebooks for McKinney-Vento students?**

In this time of virtual learning, electronic devices are absolutely necessary for students to take advantage of educational opportunities. Students must have appropriate devices to complete assignments and participate fully in the school activities being offered. A Chromebook may be one device that can allow students to participate fully in school. If your school or district is providing Chromebooks or other devices to low-income students with Title IA funds, McKinney-Vento students also should get internet with Title IA funds. McKinney-Vento students are Title I students, and they should be served through Title I funding. With school closures, many schools and districts are providing hotspots and devices to all students or to all low-income students. McKinney-Vento students must have access to those resources.

If there are no other options for McKinney-Vento students to receive the devices they need to participate fully in school activities, then McKinney-Vento funds can be used.

## **6. Can gift cards for food be paid for with Title I funds?**

Yes (with some caveats) according to existing guidance. At this time, existing guidance on uses of Title I funds remains in effect. [Existing guidance](#) on allowable uses of Title IA homeless set-asides (section M-4) is below. Please note that food is specifically listed as an allowable use of the set-aside, “to help homeless students effectively take advantage of educational opportunities.” At the same time, other available food resources, such as free school meals through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, must be accessed as a first option.

“Title I, Part A funds may be used to provide a wide variety of services to homeless students. In addition to providing services to assist homeless students in meeting the State’s challenging academic standards, Title I, Part A funds may be used to provide services to homeless children and youths, including those in Title I schools, that may not ordinarily be provided to other Title I students. (ESEA section 1113(c)(3)(C)(ii)). For example, to help homeless students effectively take advantage of educational opportunities, an LEA may use Title I, Part A funds to provide, where appropriate, items or services including, but not limited to—

- Items of clothing, particularly if necessary to meet a school’s dress or uniform requirement;
- Clothing and shoes necessary to participate in physical education classes;
- Student fees that are necessary to participate in the general education program;
- Personal school supplies such as backpacks and notebooks;
- Birth certificates necessary to enroll in school;
- Immunizations;
- Food;
- Medical and dental services;
- Eyeglasses and hearing aids;
- Counseling services to address anxiety related to homelessness that is impeding learning;
- Outreach services to students living in shelters, motels, and other temporary residences;
- Extended learning time (before and after school, Saturday classes, summer school) to compensate for lack of quiet time for homework in shelters or other overcrowded living conditions;
- Tutoring services, especially in shelters or other locations where homeless students live;
- Parental involvement specifically oriented to reaching out to parents of homeless students;
- Fees for AP and IB testing;
- Fees for college entrance exams such as SAT or ACT; and

- GED testing for school-age students.

“Two principles govern the use of Title I, Part A funds to provide such services to homeless students. First, the services must be reasonable and necessary to assist homeless students to take advantage of educational opportunities. (ESEA section 1113(c)(3)(A); 2 CFR § 200.403(a)). Second, Title I, Part A funds must be used only as a last resort when funds or services are not available from other public or private sources, such as the USDA’s National School Lunch Program and Breakfast Program, public health clinics, or local discretionary funds (sometimes provided by the PTA) used to provide similar services for economically disadvantaged students generally. (See ESEA section 1115(e)(2)).”

**7. If rural schools do not provide meals during this time, can McKinney-Vento or Title I, Part A funds be used to purchase food?**

If schools are completely closed down, with no required or optional virtual learning opportunities and no meals, then it would not be appropriate to use Title I or McKinney-Vento funds to provide meals. There would be no connection between the food and education. However, if schools are providing some optional or required learning opportunities, then food can be provided if needed to help students take advantage of those opportunities.

**8. Is there specific information or guidance that states that we can use McKinney-Vento or Title I funds to purchase gift cards that we can provide to our district business office?**

[The Department of Education's McKinney-Vento guidance](#) references providing gas cards on page 31. This is the only explicit reference to gift cards. However, the allowable uses of McKinney-Vento funds, and the Title IA homeless set-aside, are broad. See the previous question for Title IA guidance. There are 16 allowable uses for McKinney-Vento funds, including “(16) The provision of other extraordinary or emergency assistance needed to enable homeless children and youths to attend school and participate fully in school activities.” 42 USC 11433(d)(16). Even if the district has rules against gift cards, the McKinney-Vento Act specifically allows for “extraordinary assistance.” The McKinney-Vento Act overrules district procedures on everything from residency to immunizations to the rights of youth. The very purpose of the Act is to override district procedures to accommodate the unique needs of homeless students. In fact, the Act requires states and LEAs to “review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless children and youths, and the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in schools in the State.” 42 USC 11432(g)(1)(I). Therefore, if a prohibition on gift cards is a barrier to enrollment (which includes “participating fully in school activities”) or retention in school that policy must be revised.



**9. How would gift cards be distributed?**

Gift cards could be distributed where food or other items are distributed, whether by delivery or pick-up. Online gift cards also can be sent by email or text, just by forwarding the link to the card.

**10. Are local educational agencies able to use McKinney-Vento funding for motels?**

No, not at this time. The McKinney-Vento Act's allowable uses of funds remain in effect. Housing costs, including motels, are not allowable.

**11. Can funds for summer learning be used for seniors starting college in the fall who want to take summer courses at the college they will be attending?**

If those students are still enrolled in high school, funds can be used to pay for dual enrollment college classes. Those classes are a great way for McKinney-Vento students to get a jump on college credits, at no cost to them. They can help keep students engaged in high school and on track for graduation. (See 42 USC 11433(d)(7).) However, if the students have graduated and no longer are part of your school or district, then you cannot use district funds to pay for their college classes.

**12. I have hygiene items in my office currently. How do I get them out while still documenting that only McKinney-Vento students are getting the items as required by my grant?**

Contact your State Coordinator to discuss waivers of certain elements of your grant requirements, considering the current situation of school closures. You certainly can and should do your best to distribute items only to McKinney-Vento students through your own outreach. You could package them in bags or boxes with a student's name on them, so when students/families receive school meals through delivery or grab-and-go, the student/family can pick up their hygiene box, as well. (The box or bag should not indicate the student's homeless status). Some districts also are using the US Mail to mail food, hygiene products, and other items to wherever students are staying. They are reaching out to families and students to confirm a current mailing address.

If you are taking reasonable steps to ensure the items go to McKinney-Vento students, but some end up with nonhomeless students, you should not be penalized for that, at this unique moment in time. When services are provided on school grounds, McKinney-Vento funds can be used "to provide the same services to other children and youths who are determined by the local educational agency to be at risk of failing in, or dropping out of, school." 42 USC 11433(a)(2)(B)(i). While that clause is not completely applicable to this question, it shows that Congress intended to allow McKinney-Vento funds to be used for services for nonhomeless, at-

risk students, in certain circumstances. A limited waiver of grant requirements to document that only McKinney-Vento students receive hygiene products seems reasonable, in the particular circumstances of coronavirus response, and if the liaison is making all reasonable efforts to ensure that only McKinney-Vento students are receiving the items.

**13. Do you think there will both an increase of Title 1 funding and additional funding for McKinney-Vento students specifically?**

On Friday, March 27, the president signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), H.R. 748. This \$2 trillion package includes a wide range of funding and policy measures to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, including to address the early care, education, and emergency housing needs of children, youth, and families. Among other things, the package includes an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund of \$13 billion to state educational agencies (SEAs), which will be distributed to SEAs based on the Title I, Part A formula. SEAs must distribute at least 90% of these funds to local educational agencies (LEAs), also based on the Title I Part A formula. Allowable uses of funds specifically include activities authorized under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, and activities to address the unique needs of students experiencing homelessness, including how outreach and service delivery will meet their needs. Additional supplemental funding may come out in future coronavirus stimulus bills.

**14. What's the projected timeline for supplemental funds to get to the front lines?**

CARES Act funds have to be out to states within 60 days of March 27. Hopefully, since states have to allocate funds to LEAs according to a formula, the funds will flow very quickly from states to LEAs.

**Transportation**

**1. Can students continue to use their Orca (public transportation) cards for transportation?**

Absolutely. The McKinney-Vento Act requires transportation to the school of origin, and it also requires LEAs to eliminate barriers to “enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in schools.” 42 USC 11432(g)(1)(I). Enrollment means “attending classes and participating fully in school activities.” 42 USC 11434a(1). In our current situation of massive school closures, participating in school activities means participating in school meals, virtual learning, and any other activities the LEA is providing at this time. Students may need public transportation to participate in school activities. LEAs should continue providing transportation support as needed to eliminate barriers to enrollment (participation) and retention in school.

## **2. Are we allowed to use McKinney-Vento funds to provide transportation to child care during this time?**

Yes (with caveats). At this time, [existing guidance on uses of McKinney-Vento funds](#) remains in effect. Allowable uses of funds may be expanded, and we are advocating actively for such flexibility. However, as of March 20, 2020, existing guidance remains in effect. One allowable use of funds is: “(16) The provision of other extraordinary or emergency assistance needed to enable homeless children and youths to attend school and participate fully in school activities.” 42 USC 11433(d)(16). In this time of school closures, a child’s participation in child care may be necessary to permit a student to participate fully in school activities, be that meals, virtual classes, or other activities. If transportation to child care is necessary to enable a student to participate in school activities, then yes, McKinney-Vento funds may be used to provide transportation to child care.

## **3. How can we get bus passes to students and parents with school closed?**

Bus passes can be distributed where food or other items are distributed, whether by delivery or pick-up. Some districts also are using the US Mail to mail items to wherever students are staying. They are reaching out to families and students to confirm a current mailing address.

## **Food**

### **1. What guidance has the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) put out to facilitate access to school meals during school closures?**

FNS has [waived](#) the requirement to serve school [meals in a congregate setting](#). In addition, FNS is [allowing delivery](#) of school meals and has [waived meal time](#) requirements. Parents and guardians can pick up or receive meals for their children [without the children being present](#). FNS is updating their guidance very frequently. Their [COVID-19 website](#) has all the latest information.

### **2. Since our families lack transportation to pick up meals at designated school locations, we have asked that a family be given permission to pick up food for others, but we are told that USDA is not permitting that. Suggestions to overcome this barrier?**

We have shared this question with USDA for guidance. At this time, [parents and guardians can pick up meals](#) for their own children, without the children being present. Many districts are delivering meals to students using school buses and through community partnerships.

**3. Can students who are staying in one district, but attend school in a different district (school of origin), access school meals in the district where they are staying, if that is easier for them to access?**

We have shared this question with USDA for guidance. Anecdotally, we have heard from many districts that they are not requesting IDs and are providing meals to anyone who comes to pick them up.

**4. How are school districts providing food to students?**

- Mesa Public Schools, AZ: “My district is currently implementing a strategy to have meals delivered to shelters and transitional housing program contacts for them to distribute to their clients. We have a well maintained list of McKinney-Vento students that have current email addresses and phone numbers. We are going to send a message out through School Messenger (voicemail, text and email) to provide instructions about where to receive meals, even if they do not reside in the Mesa Public Schools boundaries.”
- “In Washington state, there are Meals on Wheels programs where schools are delivering to bus stops.”
- “In Seattle/King county, the McKinney-Vento liaisons shared all of our meal info in a shared handout to connect our families to lunches closest to them.”
- Methow Valley Schools, WA: “We have been issuing food gift cards to McKinney-Vento families. We were contacted by a parent yesterday who reported that someone tried to sell her a \$100 food card for cash outside the grocery store. We are revamping our system so that we are creating our own voucher that says explicitly “Food Only.” The cards we have been distributing, which we purchased from a local grocery store, do not say “Food Only” so we have been writing it on the cards with permanent ink.”
- White River School District: “We are distributing breakfast and lunch to our students at bus stops.”
- Ventura County, CA: “LEAs are providing breakfast and lunch to all students that come to the designated schools during specified hours. I am working with a community partner to get hygiene kits.”
- Washington state and Michigan: Any student can go to any food pick up and get meals.
- North Thurston, WA: “Our district is feeding all kids and have our family and youth resource center with get and go food, school supplies, hygiene supplies, books, and self-stable food.”
- Phoenix, AZ: “We are working with a large family shelter to see how we can partner to deliver meals to the site.”
- Cherokee County, GA: “School buses running regular routes 2x weekly, handing out food at regular bus stops; buses are going for extended periods of time into known impoverished communities.”
- ND: “Students living out of this district are not receiving school meals, so as the liaison I have been taking out these items to our students.”
- In California: [Healthy Eating.org](https://www.healthyeating.org) compiled a comprehensive list of the various School Meal Sites throughout California. You can narrow it down by the County and school district.

Healthyeating.org also has helped with locating grab and go programs in neighboring districts for our families housed out of district.”

**5. Are LEA's required to provide an option to receive food and nutrition services during the school closure? I am specifically asking for highly mobile students. They lack transportation and do not reside near one of our food distribution locations.**

LEAs are not required to participate in the school meals program. However, if they do participate in school meals, they need to provide those meals equitably for all students. There are two arguments for this. First, the McKinney-Vento Act requires LEAs to eliminate barriers to “enrollment and retention of homeless children and youths in schools.” 42 USC 11432(g)(1)(I). Enrollment means “attending classes and participating fully in school activities.” 42 USC 11434a(1). In our current situation of massive school closures, participating in school activities means participating in school meals, virtual learning, and any other activities the LEA is providing at this time. Therefore, LEAs must ensure students experiencing homelessness can participate in school meals. Second, although this is an unprecedented situation, with no clear written guidance regarding requirements for meal delivery, it seems reasonable to presume it would be a civil rights violation if students in poverty, in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or in other vulnerable positions, are not able to access school meals, while other students are accessing meals.

**6. Most of the questions in our state have to do with food distribution. Districts are looking for best practices, especially providing meals close to where students are staying, rather than requiring them to go to their school of origin in another district for meals.**

We have asked USDA’s Food and Nutrition services for clear guidance on allowing districts to provide food to students who are living in their boundaries, but not attending their schools. Anecdotally, we have heard of many districts working together in their local region to determine which district is able to provide food to students staying in their area, even if not attending their schools. LEAs are coming up with cooperative arrangements for this.

**7. Has anyone figured out a good grocery delivery option for families, in case communities begin shelter-in-place?**

Delivery services are in flux in terms of availability and timing. However, Amazon, Costco, Kroger, Albertsons, Walmart, Sprouts, and many other delivery options are available. It depends which services are available and working in your area.

- 8. Supplemental funding from Congress is now available so that all households with children who were receiving free or reduced price meals at school before their school closed, are now eligible to receive cash benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), even if they were not receiving SNAP previously. Can we share this information with parents and youth now? Or will there be state-specific guidance sent out?**

All households with children who were receiving free or reduced price meals at school before their school closed, are now [eligible to receive cash benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), even if they were not receiving SNAP previously. States currently are developing procedures to provide those benefits through Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Every state has to develop its own procedures to implement this new (temporary) SNAP rule. You can let families and youth know they should check your state's SNAP website regularly for information on how to receive those benefits.

## **Academics, Testing, and Internet Connectivity**

- 1. How are states and school districts supporting full academic participation for students at this time, with schools closed?**

[Spectrum](#), [Comcast](#), [Xfinity Wifi](#), and [Cox](#) are offering free internet right now, with some restrictions. There probably are other local providers doing this as well.

- In Florida:
  - The Florida Department of Education and K-12 school districts are instructed to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from Reading Scholarship Accounts, the Reading Instruction Allocation, the Digital Classroom Allocation and the Teachers Classroom Supply Assistance Program to help low-income students purchase digital devices and establish Internet services.
  - In order to facilitate the remote connection between teachers and students, K-12 school districts are further permitted to redirect unspent Title 2 funds to help low-income students purchase digital devices and establish Internet services.
  - K-12 school districts are permitted to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from the Safe Schools and Mental Health allocations to virtual and telephonic mental health counseling services for students who need emotional support due to COVID-19.
- New Orleans Public Schools has purchased 5,000 hotspots and 10,000 Chrometables. McKinney-Vento students will be offered these tools first.
- Hernando County Public Schools, FL: "We are prioritizing McKinney-Vento students in the distribution of school-issued laptops and reaching out to all unaccompanied youth

to ensure they have the free Sprint phones and that we are following up on their basic and housing needs.”

- Green Bay, WI: “We sent our students home with Kajeets, which are mobile hotspots that provide their households with wifi. Our district has a certain number of these devices that we purchased and can loan out to students and families in need.”
- Spokane, WA: “Our district has provided school supplies, books, laptops, mobile hot spots, and lots and lots of educational fun games to our emergency shelters (games provide positive ways for parents to interact with children in ways that create thinking and problem solving skills). Our shelters were most excited for the games. For some time, our district has maintained mobile hot spots that could be checked out for online learning courses. Our district just expanded this.”
- White River School District: “We have provided every student grade 2-12 a Chromebook for Distant Learning. We have given mobile hotspots, as well.”
- Virginia Beach: “Social workers are contacting all of their families/students. We are in the process of getting wi-fi access to McKinney-Vento students who need it.”
- North Thurston, WA: “Our students have 1:1 Chromebooks in secondary and hotspots at elementary. We are putting out Chromebooks and hotspots to PreK-5 students now. The powering up is tricky. All our schools have open wifi in all parking lots. The hotspots are disks for the students’ Chromebooks. We were already providing them for all families that needed them, but now we have expanded to provide them to all students who request them.”
- The Community Partnership Charter School, NY: “We have purchased pre-paid phones for their students in transitional housing and find that they are working well for access to digital instruction.”

## **2. Are there waivers or exceptions for standardized testing, graduation and grades?**

On March 20, 2020, the US Department of Education [announced](#) that it would not enforce federal standardized testing requirements for K-12 schools. The Department also will consider waiver of accountability determinations and chronic absenteeism measures and consequences.

In Florida:

- All remaining assessments for school readiness, voluntary prekindergarten and K-12 assessments are cancelled for the 2019-2020 school year.
- Requirements for graduation and promotion, and final course grades will be evaluated as though those assessments which were cancelled did not exist.

## **Housing**

### **1. How are school districts providing temporary housing to students?**

- Mesa Public Schools, AZ has a partnership with a local agency (Community Bridges). They have access to motel vouchers. They are prepared to take new referrals from our McKinney-Vento families if needed.
- Hernando Public Schools, FL: “We are collaborating with shelters to assist with emergency shelter.”
- The City of San Antonio will not evict anyone, and utilities will not be shut off.
- WA state has a moratorium on rental evictions signed by the governor yesterday as well.

**2. Is there a sustainable framework being developed to help homeless youth and families shelter in place to keep them safe? Is there additional funding for shelter or housing?**

On Friday, March 27, the president signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), H.R. 748. This \$2 trillion package includes a wide range of funding and policy measures to respond to the coronavirus outbreak, including emergency shelter and homeless assistance funds:

- \$25 million for Runaway and Homeless Youth Act grants to supplement existing funds, without matching requirements.
- \$4 billion for Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG).
  - Up to \$2 billion of these funds must be distributed to 2020 grantees under the FY2020 formula; allocations must be made within 30 days.
  - Remaining funds must be allocated to states or local units of government by a formula determined by the Secretary; these allocations must be made within 90 days.
  - Individuals considered to be at “at risk of homelessness” are eligible for prevention activities funded under ESG. This includes children and youth identified as homeless by schools and school districts.

We expect to know more soon about how the ESG formula will be calculated and the funds disseminated.

**3. Are there any protections from evictions from apartments or motels at this time?**

We have not seen national hotel eviction protections yet. We have heard reports of some local governments, such as Clark County, NV, putting such protections in place. Some landlord/tenant laws do cover motels that are being used as long-term residences (maybe 90 days or more). But this varies greatly and depends on state laws and even local ordinances, so you would need to check locally.



There are limited national protections from evictions from apartments. The CARES Act provides that eligible landlords who receive forbearance of their mortgage payments on rental properties (available for 90 days) cannot evict renters or charge late fees or penalties for nonpayment of rent. Also, federally-backed mortgages cannot be put in foreclosure until at least May 17. Some landlords who are not required to provide extra time for renters to pay the rent are offering extensions anyway, in recognition of the economic burdens of the time. Some states also have taken similar action. For example, Nevada's Governor Steve Sisolak announced a moratorium on all evictions and foreclosures in Nevada for 90 days, for both residential and commercial tenants. The moratorium not only applies to future evictions, but also those that have already been filed in the courts.

## **Mental Health**

### **1. How are school districts supporting the mental health needs of children, youth and families?**

- Florida K-12 school districts are permitted to redirect unspent 2019-2020 funds from the Safe Schools and Mental Health allocations to virtual and telephonic mental health counseling services for students who need emotional support due to COVID-19.
- Hernando County Public Schools, FL: "We are reaching out to all unaccompanied youth to ensure that we are following up on their basic and housing needs; following up with all existing McKinney-Vento students/families to do needs assessments and connect with services. We are trying to work closely with district staff to ensure we are assisting McKinney-Vento to our fullest capacity."

### **2. Can you suggest resources for how to talk to children about coronavirus?**

The National Association of School Psychologists has some [excellent mental health resources](#), including one for [talking with children about coronavirus](#). Our friends at Sesame Street also came out with some resources, available at <https://www.sesamestreet.org/caring>.

## **Special Education**

### **1. How can districts do IEP meetings with schools closed?**

It is allowable to hold IEP meetings virtually, over the phone or via video conference. For example, in Georgia, IEP and 504 meetings are continuing as scheduled through web based video meetings.

**2. Doing IEP meetings virtually is great, but how can we deliver services for students that struggle with an emotional or behavioral disorder or some other disability that generally relies on in-person connection?**

The Department of Education has provided some [guidance](#) on this question:

- “If an LEA continues to provide educational opportunities to the general student population during a school closure, the school must ensure that students with disabilities also have equal access to the same opportunities, including the provision of FAPE. (34 CFR §§ 104.4, 104.33 (Section 504) and 28 CFR § 35.130 (Title II of the ADA)). SEAs, LEAs, and schools must ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, each student with a disability can be provided the special education and related services identified in the student’s IEP developed under IDEA, or a plan developed under Section 504”
- “The Department understands there may be exceptional circumstances that could affect how a particular service is provided.”
- “IEP teams may, but are not required to, include distance learning plans in a child’s IEP that could be triggered and implemented during a selective closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak. Such contingent provisions may include the provision of special education and related services at an alternate location or the provision of online or virtual instruction, instructional telephone calls, and other curriculum-based instructional activities, and may identify which special education and related services, if any, could be provided at the child’s home.”

As the situation changes daily, safety for children, families, and instructional personnel must be considered. Some face-to-face services will not be able to be delivered at this time.

The [SETDA Coalition for eLearning](#) recently offered a webinar on the topic of [Supporting Students with IEPs During eLearning Days](#).

## **Higher Education**

**1. How are colleges helping their students access food, besides keeping their food pantry open?**

- National Resource: Students, parents of students and graduates can apply for \$200 in cash assistance. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. <https://myscholly.com/relief/>
- In New Orleans: “Local colleges are allowing any student with a University/College ID to eat on campus.”
- In Washington: “The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and College Success Foundation (CSF) are checking in with our former foster care students and

our unaccompanied homeless youth in college to provide information and resources re: food, financial aid, work study, etc.”

- Butte Community College in Chico and Oroville CA opened their food pantries for students to access between 9 am and 4 pm.
- University of Tennessee Chattanooga: “We are looking for homeless students, and we have services available on campus for them.”

## **2. Is there any federal guidance on supporting college students at this time?**

The U.S. Department of Education has put out [guidance](#) for institutions of higher education. This guidance provides flexibility on financial aid, distance education, federal work study payments, and other issues, and includes a [FAQ document](#).

The [Children’s Bureau released guidance](#) to child welfare leaders calling on agencies to immediately contact all youth in or formerly in foster care who may need assistance finding or securing housing while their college or university is closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter notes that agencies should also be prepared to offer youth assistance with food, health care, and emotional support.

We encourage states and universities to do the same for students experiencing homelessness. Many McKinney-Vento liaisons are still in touch with recent graduates in college and could reach out. At institutions of higher education, student services, campus life, housing, and professors may know of students struggling with homelessness. Reviewing FAFSA data to identify unaccompanied youth who are independent students also should trigger additional outreach. Finally, those institutions that have [homeless liaisons on campus](#) are best positioned to know who their homeless students are, what they need, and how to reach them.

## **3. When college students lose their federal work study job due to campus closures or their job closing, can they still get paid?**

Yes. The U.S. Department of Education has issued [guidance](#) stating that:

“For students enrolled and performing [federal work study (FWS)] at a campus that must close due to COVID-19, or for a FWS student who is employed by an employer that closes as a result of COVID-19, the institution may continue paying the student Federal work-study wages during that closure if it occurred after the beginning of the term, the institution is continuing to pay its other employees (including faculty and staff), and the institution continues to meet its institutional wage share requirement.”

**4. Has USDA made any changes to SNAP eligibility for college students? Many college dining halls are closed, or students have had to leave campus, and they cannot meet their work requirements.**

Work requirements have not been waived for college students. Right now, students are still required to work 20 hours a week in order to qualify for benefits. However, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services announced this week that it submitted a waiver for work requirements for college students and is awaiting a response.

### **Jobs/Unemployment**

**1. For youth and parents who have lost hours at work, but have not been fired or laid off, can they get unemployment benefits?**

Maybe. The CARES Act [increased and expanded eligibility](#) for unemployment benefits. The CARES Act provides an extra \$600 per week in emergency federal unemployment compensation through July 31, 2020, in addition to state benefits. The CARES Act also provides funding for states that want to provide benefits for workers who lose hours, but are not laid off. However, not every state provides those benefits. State-specific details are available [here](#), or by visiting your state’s Department of Labor website. There often are long wait times on the phone, so filing on-line (if possible) is recommended.

A very basic Q&A on new unemployment benefits that we have found helpful is available [here](#).

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