

Tips for McKinney-Vento Liaisons: COVID-19 & Student Homelessness

(Last Updated 04/01/20)

Below is a list of **tips for McKinney-Vento Liaisons** for supporting students in temporary housing (STH) through the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures. For the latest updates, continue to visit [NYS-TEACHS' COVID-19 News](#) section, [NYS Education Department's COVID-19 site](#), and [SchoolHouse Connection's COVID-19 and Homelessness](#) resources, and in particular, its [COVID Virtual Conversation and Q&A](#).

Sections:

- Meeting the Immediate Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness
- Connecting with Students Experiencing Homelessness & Outreach
- Liaison Self-Care

Meeting the Immediate Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

Below are short tips and strategies for meeting the basic needs of students and families who are experiencing homelessness during this difficult time. In-depth suggestions and resources can be found on our [COVID-19 Resource List](#).

1. **Be as flexible as possible regarding feeding students to better ensure food/meal access to all who need it.**
 - Provide meals to all students who show up at a grab-and-go site regardless of the student's enrollment status in the school/district.
 - Allow one family to pick up meals for another family who may not be able to safely get to the pick-up site.
 - Deliver meals (along with school supplies and coursework) via food truck, school bus, or other vehicles to key locations throughout the district. This is especially impactful in rural areas where families may not have safe or reliable access to transportation or to families for whom transportation is a barrier to receiving meals or other supplies.
 - Coordinate with [Door Dash](#) to provide free delivery on meals to medically-vulnerable students in New York City.
2. **Support the remote-learning needs of students experiencing homelessness.**
 - Ensure access to Internet/wi-fi and remote learning devices for students experiencing homelessness.
 - Ensure that someone from the district (liaison, principal, teacher, counselor, school-aide, etc.) is conducting regular educational check-ins with all students experiencing homelessness and is securing any help they may need to keep up with their coursework. (See Connecting with



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- Students Experiencing Homelessness & Outreach section below for more strategies.)
- Create additional flexibility for deadlines for students in temporary housing who are experiencing difficulties completing work because of their unstable housing.
3. **Support the physical and mental health needs of students and families experiencing homelessness.**
 4. Share online resources related to self-care and physical/mental health to students and families (for example, [Healthy & Ready to Learn](#) for self-care and physical activity tips in English and in Spanish, [Headspace](#) or [Calm](#) for free guided meditations, [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#), [GoNoodle](#) for movement and mindfulness activities, and NYC Department of Education's pages on [Physical Education & Activity](#) and [Health Education](#)).
 - Encourage students to continue to communicate with one another safely through virtual means to prevent isolation or loneliness during this period of physical social distancing (e.g., texting, video chatting, phone calls, emails, instant messaging).
 - Encourage parents and students to create daily routines to foster mental and physical well-being and to create a sense of predictability during these uncertain times. (This [sample schedule from Health & Ready to Learn](#) could be used as a starting point; changes could be made to it to reflect remote learning in temporary housing.)
 - Encourage parents or youth to create a menu of activities or self-care practices to have on hand to choose from. Examples of activities for children or youth include:
 - Making art (collages with old newspapers or magazines, coloring books, etc.)
 - Journaling together and writing about positive memories, dreams for the future, and current emotions
 - Getting active: taking a dance break, doing yoga stretches, walking around the neighborhood while keeping a safe distance from others.
 - Brainstorm with parents about how to communicate with their children about COVID-19. [The National Association of School Psychologist's Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#) is a great place to start.

Connecting with Students Experiencing Homelessness & Outreach

Due to the tremendous health, social, and economic pressures during this time, be prepared to identify new families who have become homeless and to check-in regularly with students already identified as McKinney-Vento eligible.

1. **Proactively reach out to all families identified as McKinney-Vento eligible** to ask about immediate needs and let them know you are a source of support during this time. Be intentional about preserving relationships with students and families in temporary housing by continuing to regularly check-in, particularly with homeless unaccompanied youth.
2. **Create an 'out-of-the-office' message or email signature that includes a list of community resources** for people to turn to if you are not currently available.
3. **Be aware of increased housing instability during this time and check-in with students and parents** who have a history of moving often or who have recently indicated a change in address. For more information



about having sensitive conversations with students and families about their housing status see the [National Center for Homeless Education's brief on Confirming Eligibility for McKinney-Vento Rights & Services](#).

4. **Be mindful that this is a challenging and potentially re-traumatizing time** for students and families experiencing homelessness. Express your concern for their well-being and provide support as best as you can.
5. **Pay specific attention to students and families who are living in temporary housing outside of the school district** where they are currently enrolled and make sure they are receiving information about local resources.
6. **Create a survey or needs assessment** and use it in your outreach to better understand how to support families experiencing homelessness in your community.
7. **Create and distribute parent and student-friendly resource guides** with specific information about your school's available services during school closures and any plans about re-opening.
8. **Send out materials (posters, flyers, and brochures) with information about McKinney-Vento** to campgrounds, motels, community centers, and other areas where families or youth may be seeking shelter at this time.
9. **Reach out to partner organizations and local community agencies** and collaborate on providing services and conducting outreach to families and youth experiencing homelessness.

Liaison Self-Care

The best way to ensure you have the capacity to support students and families experiencing homelessness is by fostering your own well-being during this time.

1. **Set boundaries** in order to foster sustainable support for students and families in temporary housing.
 - Create and stick to a schedule for when to communicate with students and families.
 - If you are not able to provide support at a certain time, share resources or let the other person know when in the future you will be available to talk.
2. **Take regular breaks** from watching, reading, and listening to the news, including social media.
3. **Incorporate self-care and mindfulness practices** into your everyday routine.
 - Participate in free guided meditations on websites such as [Headspace](#).
 - Look through these [50 Ways to Take a Break](#).
 - Reflect and journal about your experience in the moment. Check out these [Six Daily Questions to Ask Yourself in Quarantine](#) for some excellent prompts.
4. **Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed** or if you are concerned that the COVID-19 situation is affecting your ability to care for others:
 - Reach out to other school staff and collaborators to talk about the challenges you are currently facing.
 - If you are struggling, find **mental health support** through the [New York State Office of Mental \(OMH\) Health Program Directory](#) or by calling the [OMH Emotional Support Line \(1-844-863-9314\)](#). In NYC, contact [NYC-Well \(1-888-692-9355\)](#) to connect with someone who will listen and help 24/7.



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Resources Compiled From:

- Thank you to the many New York State McKinney-Vento Liaisons who have shared ideas and offered tips included in this checklist.
- [Beyond the Food Pantry: COVID-19 Response for Students Who are Homeless or With Experience in Foster Care](#)
- [Center for Disease Control & Prevention's COVID-19 Manage Anxiety & Stress](#)
- [Healthy & Ready to Learn's Making Space For Ourselves](#)
- [MENTOR's Tips for Maintaining Connection With Young People During a Time of Social Distancing](#)
- [The National Association of School Psychologist's Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection's Checklist for Local Education Agencies and Early Childhood Providers](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection's COVID Virtual Conversation Q&A](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection's Evolving Lessons During COVID-19](#)



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