



The American Rescue Plan for Homeless Children and Youth in California

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS



School Health
Evaluation and Research

UCSF

University of California
San Francisco

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FUNDING

The California Department of Education's American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Fund

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Michael Duke, PhD, Grace Taylor, and Tianna Jacques from the UCSF Benioff Housing and Homelessness Initiative for leading the ARP-HCY Recipient Interview data collection, including conducting the interviews and analyzing and summarizing findings. We would also like to thank the young adult leaders and advocates who provided feedback on the ARP-HCY *Young Adult & Parent/Guardian Survey*: Aminah Parker, Alexis Obinna, Derrianna Johnson, Keanu Yamanaka, Perla Otto, Bridges, Iziah Choquette, Fernando Olivarez, Noah Shui, and Jacqueline Talavera.



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Approximately four percent (n=246,480) of California’s public school students experienced homelessness in the 2022-23 school year, representing a 10% increase from the previous school year.¹ This increase was largely due to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In July 2021, the California Department of Education (CDE) received \$98.7 million in American Rescue Plan - Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) federal funding to identify and support the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness throughout the state. The ARP-HCY funds had to be expended by September 30, 2024. The CDE distributed the funds to county offices of education (COEs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) statewide to enhance technical assistance provided to homeless education

liaisons, disseminate best practices in serving youth experiencing homelessness, and to provide direct services and supports through flexible funding to meet students’ immediate needs to ensure an comparable educational experience to their stably housed peers.

From June 2023 to September 2024, the CDE contracted with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School Health Evaluation and Research Team to evaluate the ARP-HCY funding program implementation. The evaluation utilized surveys, interviews, program tracking logs, and secondary analysis of program and fiscal data to document the reach and short-term outcomes of the funding. This document is a summary of the evaluation findings and recommendations made based on those findings.

Overview of ARP-HCY Funding in California



The CDE implemented four primary program components with the ARP-HCY funds, as outlined in their State plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Education² and described below. The CDE also allocated a portion of these funds to state-level operations to support LEAs serving youth experiencing homelessness, manage fiscal aspects of the ARP-HCY fund distribution, and conduct an evaluation of the ARP-HCY program.

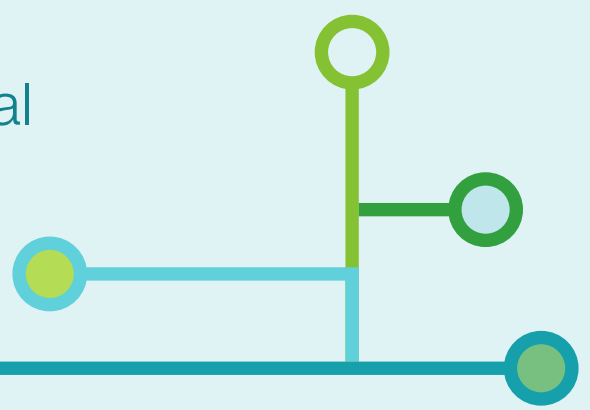
1 Homeless Education Technical Assistance Centers (HETACs) - Three HETACs, each led by a county office of education (COE), used a regional approach to provide support and technical assistance to other COEs. The goal was to ensure that COEs statewide had the capacity, resources, and tools required to support their LEAs by implementing the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This federal law protects the educational rights of youth experiencing homelessness.^{3,4} Additionally, the HETACs enhanced the capacity of LEA Homeless Education Liaisons statewide by providing direct technical assistance, delivering targeted trainings and webinars, and hosting an annual Statewide Homeless Education conference—all designed to strengthen support systems for youth and families experiencing homelessness.

2 Homeless Innovative Programs (HIPs) - Twenty LEAs with proven innovative practices that could be studied, adapted, and shared state-wide received \$8.9 million in funding collectively through a competitive process to disseminate their best practices to the field.

3 ARP-HCY I - 120 LEAs that were Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Grant recipients received \$18.5 million to supplement existing allocations to facilitate the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school for youth experiencing homelessness.

4 ARP-HCY II - 672 LEAs, including nearly all ARP-HCY I recipients as well as additional LEAs or consortia of LEAs, representing about 1,100 LEAs in total received \$55.5 million in funds based on a formula written in statute to identify and provide wraparound services to youth experiencing homelessness and ensure they could attend school and participate fully in school activities.

Homeless Education Technical Assistance Centers



The CDE funded three HETACs to provide support and technical assistance (TA) to COEs, LEAs, and other interested partners across the state.

lead annually, starting in the 2021–22 school year through the 2023–24 school year. Each regional HETAC lead provided customized support to their assigned COEs, as well as statewide work, including:

- Developing and maintaining the HETAC website, which provides homeless education resources,
- Hosting virtual and in-person homeless education trainings, meetings, and conferences, and
- Developing homeless education resources and guides, such as issue briefs and toolkits.

The Contra Costa, Los Angeles, and San Diego COEs served as the three HETAC leads, each assigned to serve COEs in a particular region of the state. The CDE allocated \$1.5 million to each HETAC regional

REACH OF THE HETAC STATEWIDE WORK

Training and Webinars

The Contra Costa HETAC coordinated and facilitated 22 webinars with over 2,700 attendees from July 2022 to June 2024 in collaboration with community-based organization (CBO) partners. The topics and content were determined based on needs identified by COE Coordinators and in consultation with fellow HETAC leads and the CDE. Topics included:

- Identifying Children and Youth in Homeless Situations,
- Supporting LGBTQI+ Students Experiencing Homelessness,
- Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Youth, and
- Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Students.

Data from post-webinar evaluation surveys demonstrated consistently high satisfaction across all events, with most respondents reporting they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the information they learned about would be useful in their work (89%) and they were likely to use what they learned in the future (87%).

State Conferences

Two *California Statewide Homeless Education Conferences* were held in San Diego from April 26–28, 2023, and May 8–10, 2024 with over 400 and 750 attendees, respectively. The Los Angeles HETAC led the state-level planning and facilitation, with input from the Contra Costa and San Diego HETACs and the CDE.

Resource Development

The San Diego HETAC led the development of homeless education training materials, guidance, tools, and best practices, with support from the Contra Costa and Los Angeles HETACs, who provided input on resource topics and reviewed resource drafts. The San Diego HETAC created over 12 resources, including:

- Addressing the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness Who Have Disabilities,
- The California Early Care and Education Resource Guide,
- Local Early Care and Education Programs: A Resource for Families in Transition, and
- Prompt and Proper Placement: Enrolling Students Experiencing Homelessness without Records.



Website Development

In August 2022, the San Diego HETAC launched the HETAC website that houses resources, archived webinars, guidance documents, and calendar events. The Contra Costa HETAC and Los Angeles HETAC supported these efforts by providing input on the website navigation structure and webpage topics. From January 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, there were nearly 70,000 views of the HETAC website.

REACH OF THE HETAC REGIONAL WORK

Each of the HETACs provided TA, professional development, and coaching for their region's COE Homeless Education Coordinators. Before establishing the HETACs, all questions from the 58 COEs went directly to the CDE Homeless Education Program, which serves in a statewide capacity. With the establishment of the HETACs, questions from the COEs were directed to their specific HETACs, who knew their regions and available resources. Regional-level activities included the following:

- Each HETAC lead held **individual meetings** with COE and LEA Homeless Education Liaisons to build capacity, provide general information, and support peer-to-peer learning. From January 1, 2022, to June 30, 2024, the three HETACs collectively provided over 600 TA contacts to liaisons statewide. The most common TA topics were eligibility criteria, funding, data sharing and usage, special education, enrollment, and connecting families to temporary accommodations.
- The HETACs also conducted region-specific meetings, including **Quarterly Regional Meetings** to discuss CDE and legislative updates, county spotlights, and HETAC resources and training updates, as well as **Open Office Hours** and **“Share and Learn” sessions** for in-depth discussions on specific topics. Additionally, the first **HETAC Rural Summit** was held in Shasta, California, through a collaborative effort between the Contra Costa and Los Angeles HETACs. It was a significant milestone that provided a platform for rural COEs to connect, collaborate, and discuss various topics relevant to supporting homeless students in rural settings.

- The Los Angeles HETAC's **Data Literacy Program** was a significant statewide initiative, which included workshops and popular monthly “Data & Donuts” sessions.
- The Contra Costa HETAC offered HETAC **Mini-Grants** to COEs and LEAs with California Community School Partnership Program Grants to provide targeted support for students experiencing homelessness.
- The San Diego HETAC launched a **Pilot Project Grant Initiative** for innovative projects across multiple domains. This effort evolved into a Mini-Grant Project in 2023 and a partnership with SchoolHouse Connection to establish a Community of Practice for grantees.

FIGURE 2 Percent of *COE Coordinators Survey* Respondents Reporting Increased Confidence from Year 2 to Year 3

Identifying youth experiencing homelessness

63% → 91%

Accessing and using support service and educational outcome data to improve support systems

55% → 91%

Resolving disputes regarding educational enrollment, eligibility, and school selection

55% → 91%

Meeting the needs of unaccompanied youth

63% → 88%

Informing parents/guardians of the educational and related opportunities and providing meaningful opportunities to participate

38% → 85%



COE COORDINATORS PERSPECTIVES ON HETAC SUPPORT

In an annual survey, COE Liaisons rated the usefulness of HETAC meetings and resources positively. In Spring 2024, after over two years of HETAC implementation, nearly all *COE Coordinator Survey* respondents reported that the webinars (97%), tip sheets (97%), website (95%), Quarterly Regional Meetings (95%), and one-on-one meetings (91%) were “very useful.” COE Coordinators also reported their confidence increased in each McKinney-Vento Act topic area because of the support provided by the HETACs (Figure 2).

As shown through these data, the HETACs focused on building relationships with homeless education liaisons, providing timely updates and resources, and offering flexible support options to meet the needs of the counties and LEAs in their regions.

Homeless Innovative Programs



Twenty LEAs with proven innovative practices received \$8.9 million collectively (approximately \$450,000 each) between July 2022 and September 2024 for their Homeless Innovative Programs (HIP).

The HIP grantees developed Model Innovative Practice (MIP) toolkits and then disseminated them to other LEAs who served students experiencing homelessness. The 20 selected HIP grantees were located throughout California:

- Alhambra Unified School District
- Antelope Valley Union High School District
- Chino Valley Unified School District
- Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District
- Da Vinci Rise High
- Fusion Charter School
- Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
- Kern County Superintendent of Schools
- Kings County Office of Education
- Latitude High School
- Lennox School District
- Monterey Peninsula Unified School District
- Placer County Office of Education
- Redwood City School District
- San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools
- San Francisco Unified School District
- San Luis Obispo County Office of Education
- Scholarship Prep
- Torrance Unified School District
- Wheatland Union High School District

MIP TOOLKIT DEVELOPMENT AND DISSEMINATION

Over the two years of funding, the 20 HIP grantees made 200 **presentations on their MIP Toolkits** to nearly 14,000 individuals at conferences locally, statewide, and nationally. In addition to local school district and county presentations, they also presented at major statewide conferences, including:

- The California All Titles Conference,
- The California Association of Supervisors of Child Welfare and Attendance,
- The California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth Conference,
- The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Coordinators Conference, and
- The annual California Statewide Homeless Education Conference.

Some also took their MIP Toolkit presentations to national audiences, including the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference.

Following the presentations, the HIP grantees **shared resources and guidance about their MIP Toolkits with participants**. They developed connections with LEAs who requested their TA and guidance, allowing them to offer one-on-one tailored support. Many noted they were proud of their conference presentations, conversations with other school communities (across the US and within California), and opportunities to share their practices with diverse LEAs (Figure 3).

“After presenting our MIP toolkit at multiple conferences in California and also out-of-state, we were contacted by both the Dept. of Education in Hawaii and the Dept. of Education in Washington. Both of those states were interested in implementing our toolkit within their state LEAs. —HIP GRANTEE



FIGURE 3 Percentage of HIP Grantees Focusing on Select Key Activities in Their MIP Toolkits

Developing comprehensive resource manuals or guides that compile best practices, templates, and guidelines for supporting students experiencing homelessness

100%

Leveraging community partnerships to comprehensively support students and families

90%

Improved methods for identifying and assessing the needs of students experiencing homelessness

80%

Provided support services and basic needs, e.g., housing resources, food, transportation, and clothing

75%

Provided school staff with professional development opportunities

75%

Prioritized the mental health needs of students through targeted interventions and partnerships

70%

Engaged students experiencing homelessness in developing and implementing support programs

60%

FEEDBACK FROM MIP TOOLKIT PRESENTATION PARTICIPANTS

According to the *MIP Presentation Feedback Survey*, participants who heard the MIP Toolkit presentations reported that they or their LEA were “very likely” (44%) or “likely” (40%) to implement the practices or strategies they learned about.

Nearly all *MIP Presentation Feedback Survey* Respondents Agreed that the HIP MIP Presentations:

- 98% Shared practices that were new and innovative
- 98% Presented clear action steps that they could use in their school communities
- 97% Shared practices or strategies that were feasible for their school community to implement

REFLECTIONS ON SUCCESSES AND FUTURE NEEDS

The HIP grantees shared several areas of success and innovation, as well as recommendations for future efforts based on their experiences.

Improved Identification: HIP grantees successfully identified more students experiencing homelessness by implementing their MIP Toolkit strategies, including educating youth and families about their rights to receive services, developing systems to identify and serve students, and working with community partners to use a collaborative referral form. Many emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnerships with local schools, districts, community organizations, and government agencies. These partnerships helped streamline processes, share resources, and provide a more comprehensive range of services to students and families.

Improved Collaboration: The HIP grantees appreciated the opportunity to network and brainstorm with other HIPs and homeless education professionals about the barriers they face and fine-tune their programs. One HIP grantee explained, “We came upon a way to define the work that honored and advocated for intentional collaboration and embraced the uniqueness of our community context.”

Improved Student Well-Being: Some HIP grantees emphasized that their work implementing their MIP Toolkits helped improve the school culture and student well-being, amplify student voices, and improve student attendance and graduation rates. They explained that their efforts helped to foster a more supportive school environment, improving student behavior, mental health, and overall well-being.

Sustainability Following the HIP Grant: Some of the grantees expressed confidence in their ability to sustain their programs after the funding ends, either due to alternative funding streams or the integration of the program into their existing models. Others mentioned that while they will continue to host their websites and implement strategies from their MIP Toolkits, they will no longer be able to attend as many conferences as possible, provide technical assistance, or build new partnerships, explaining that it would take much work to maintain the momentum of the past two years.

HIP Grantee Recommendations: Looking ahead, the HIP Grantees emphasized the need for improved support for youth experiencing homelessness and better resource coordination across agencies. Many grantees also emphasized the need for more unrestricted funds to support direct services, such as transportation, case management, mental health support, housing, transportation, and necessities. Overall, grantees urged for more comprehensive and flexible support to address the complex needs of youth experiencing homelessness. The HIP grantees also emphasized the importance of professional development for school staff and community partners to understand better and support youth experiencing homelessness. Some grantees suggested mandating such training statewide and questioned the effectiveness of funding conference attendance, instead favoring more direct, in-person, hands-on technical assistance and training.

ARP-HCY I and ARP-HCY II

The CDE provided ARP I and ARP II funds to over 600 LEAs or consortia of LEAs to help them better identify and serve youth experiencing homelessness.

homelessness. Additionally, 109 ARP-HCY I and 563 non-ARP-HCY I LEAs received \$55,560,291 in ARP-HCY II funding from approximately July 2021 to September 2024 to identify youth experiencing homelessness, provide wraparound services, and ensure they could attend school and participate fully in school activities. Over 1,100 LEAs received this funding as some LEAs formed consortia to access funding. See how the funding was used (Figure 5).

The CDE dispersed \$18,507,888 in ARP-HCY I funding to 120 LEAs from July 2021 to September 2024 to facilitate the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school for children and youth experiencing



FIGURE 5 Activities Implemented with ARP-HCY I and II Funds:

- Access to early childhood programs
- Before-, after-school, mentoring, summer programs
- Clothing to meet a school requirement
- Counseling
- Emergency assistance related to school attendance
- Obtaining or transferring records necessary for enrollment
- Parent education related to rights and resources for children
- Paying for short-term, temporary housing
- Providing access to internet/ internet connected devices/ equipment
- Provision of store cards/ prepaid debit cards to purchase materials necessary for students to participate in school activities
- Purchasing cell phones or other technological devices
- Referral to other programs and services
- Referrals for medical, dental, and other health services
- School supplies
- Staff professional development and awareness
- Transportation
- Tutoring or other instructional support
- Wraparound services with and/ or through community-based organizations

LEA LIAISON PERSPECTIVES ON HOW ARP-HCY FUNDING WAS USED

LEA Homeless Education Liaisons shared in interviews that they focused APR-HCY resources on meeting the immediate needs of students experiencing homelessness since the funding had to be expended quickly. Many discussed using their funding to provide **supplies to students, noting that store cards, hygiene products, school supplies, backpacks, and clothing** were relatively simple to obtain and distribute. They also provided students with transportation, gasoline cards, food, and Wi-Fi hot spots so that they could complete their homework assignments.

Another use of funds that liaisons discussed in interviews was to provide **short-term, temporary shelter** for students experiencing homelessness and their families. In many cases, LEAs used the funding to pay for short motel stays for their unhoused families. Liaisons shared that not only did this address a critical need in their communities, but this is something they were typically precluded from providing with other funding, such as Title I or EHCY.

Interview participants also shared that ARP-HCY funding allowed LEAs to **hire and support staff** dedicated to helping students experiencing homelessness. This included roles like homeless liaisons, social workers, and case managers. Before this funding, efforts to assist homeless students were often disorganized due to a lack of dedicated personnel. With this dedicated staff, LEAs could

provide better, more consistent support. The funding allowed for both new positions and allowed existing staff to spend more time addressing homelessness issues. Many provided **case management** to assist students in obtaining emergency housing. In several instances, participants reported **leveraging partnerships with community organizations** to provide their students with housing and the services they typically offer (e.g., housing navigation, down payment support and funding for the first month's rent, eviction prevention services). In addition, liaisons reported that their LEAs used the funding to **provide staff with training** on myriad topics to better support students experiencing homelessness, such as identification of students experiencing homelessness, mentoring, trauma support, McKinney-Vento Act rights, and conference attendance opportunities.

Some liaisons shared that their LEAs used the funding to **address attendance issues** common among students experiencing homelessness. They hired social workers to reach out to students directly, offered incentives to encourage school attendance, and ensured students could participate in school activities, extracurriculars, and community events. Additional uses of the funds included helping with **financial aid and college applications, summer camp, and tutoring**.

In summary, districts identified the diverse needs of students experiencing homelessness and leveraged the funding to address as many of these needs as possible.



LEA LIAISON CAPACITY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

Over half of ARP-HCY I/II Recipients (59%) who responded to the *Statewide LEA Liaison Survey* reported that their capacity to support students experiencing homelessness was higher in the 2023-24 school year compared to the 2021-22 school year. In contrast, 44% of non-ARP-HCY Recipients who responded to the survey reported that their capacity remained the same (Figure 4).

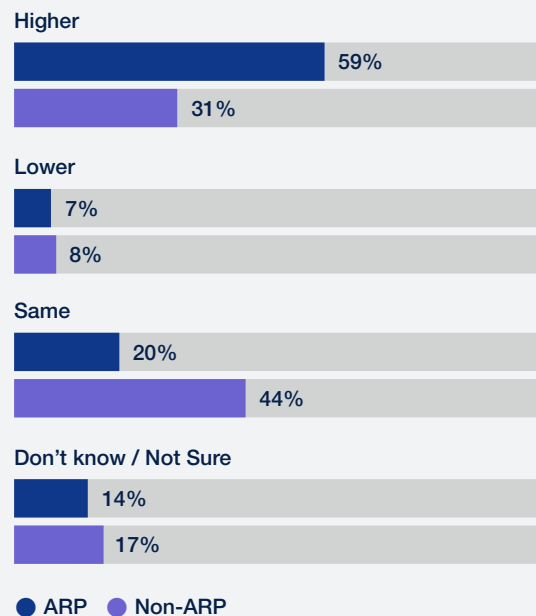
CHALLENGES USING ARP-HCY I AND II FUNDS

In the *Statewide LEA Liaison Survey*, the barriers in using the grant funds reported most often by ARP-HCY I/II recipients were hesitation to launch new programs/services with time-limited funds (37%), a limited amount of time to spend the funds (35%), and not being able to hire staff with short-term funds (30%). Interview participants explained that having to obligate the funds by September 2024 prevented them from sustainably developing programs and hiring long-term staff to serve students. They felt this prevented them from being as deliberate in using the funds as they might have been if they had more time. Other interview participants thought that the funds, though welcome, needed to be increased. One interview participant explained that they faced the difficult decision of assessing which families to support since the funding was insufficient to meet the needs of all of their students experiencing homelessness and their families. Another noted,

“*It’s not enough. It should have been more. It should be ongoing. That’s the barrier. That one-time monies are great, but regular monies are better.*

— LEA REPRESENTATIVE

FIGURE 4 *Statewide LEA Liaison Survey* Respondents’ Capacity to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness Compared to Year Before ARP-HCY Funds Were Dispersed



BENEFITS OF ARP-HCY I/II FUNDS

ARP-HCY Recipients identified many benefits of the funding, including providing essential supplies and having more flexible resources to meet youth and families' needs (Figure 5)

FIGURE 5 Percentage of LEA Liaison Survey Respondents Reporting Select Benefits of ARP-HCY Funding

Providing essential supplies, e.g., store/gas cards, school supplies, hygiene products

71%

Having more flexible resources to meet youth/family needs

66%

Identifying youth experiencing homelessness

48%

Heightening awareness and understanding of students experiencing homelessness among school staff

42%

Providing short-term, temporary housing assistance, e.g., a few days in motel

35%

The most positive impact of the ARP-HCY funds was being able to help more students/ families meet their basic needs (82%). Over half also reported increased identification of students experiencing homelessness (53%) and increased student attendance/ reduced absences (49%).

IMPACTS OF ARP-HCY FUNDING ENDING

Most ARP-HCY I/II Recipients reported that they would have to dramatically scale back their work supporting students experiencing homelessness or terminate their ARP-HCY-funded initiatives in September 2024. In the *Statewide LEA Liaison Survey*, an overwhelming 81% of ARP-HCY I/II

Recipient respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were concerned about their LEA having sufficient resources to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness in the coming school year when ARP-HCY funding ends (2024-25). In contrast, only 49% of non-ARP-HCY Recipient respondents “agreed” or “strongly” agreed with this statement.

Once ARP-HCY funding ends, ARP-HCY I/II Recipient survey respondents said their programming would be affected by the decreased provision of personal supplies (e.g., clothing, hygiene kits, eyeglasses, internet, cell phones) (55%), store cards/ prepaid debit cards (54%), school supplies (44%), transportation assistance (41%), and help with emergency/temporary housing (38%). Survey respondents also reported having to lay off or reduce full-time equivalency (FTE) for homeless liaisons, counseling staff, and case managers who support students experiencing homelessness. Several remarked that the loss of emergency housing support was particularly challenging, given that few funding sources enable them to provide that service:

“The hardest one, though, will just be the emergency housing. We have never had a funding source other than donations [and] that was very small that provided an ability to provide [emergency housing] for families as quickly as ARP-HCY did. So that's the only one that [we are] still looking for a sustainability source for that.

—LEA REPRESENTATIVE

Interview participants shared that students and families who received ARP-HCY funding support also expressed anxiety in the face of the loss of funding. One interview participant shared:

“The sense of desperation. Just immediately, I felt anxious because the sense of desperation immediately increased in me and everybody. A lot of families on my caseload are saying, ‘There's no more funding. There's no more funding’. So, I know that they're already hearing that, and it feels like it's not going to get any better.

—LEA REPRESENTATIVE

Young Adult and Parent/ Guardian Perspectives



In Spring 2024, UCSF and the CDE launched the *Young Adult & Parent/Guardian Survey*.

homelessness to better understand their needs and how schools can support them. Surveys were received from 156 *young adults* and 153 *parents/guardians*. The following is a summary of the survey results. *Results should be interpreted with caution as they represent the sample of respondents and may not be generalizable to all young adults and families with experiences of housing instability in California.*

When asked about their current housing situation, one-third (33%) of respondents reported living in a house/ apartment that they own or rent, and 23% reported living in a house/apartment with friends or family members within capacity. Others reported residing in transitional housing (12%), a homeless shelter (12%), or a house/apartment with friends or family over capacity over capacity (10%). Other responses included living in a hotel/motel (5%) or couch surfing (4%).

This statewide survey was administered to young adults and parents/guardians who were experiencing or had previously experienced

IMPACTS OF HOMELESSNESS

Two out of five (40%) respondents reported that their housing situation worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with more young adults reporting this than parents/guardians (50% vs. 33%). Only 4% of all respondents reported that their housing situation improved, and 44% reported that it did not change.

When asked if children and youth experiencing homelessness can have the same educational experience as all other students, almost half of all respondents reported “Not really” (28%) or “Not at all” (18%), while just over half reported “Yes, very much so” (24%) or “Yes, somewhat” (30%). Survey respondents were also asked, “What makes their educational experiences the same or different?” The most common responses were the lack of resources (e.g., necessities including food, clothing, shoes, shelter, school supplies, money, etc.), lack of stability due to no consistent routine, home, or food access; and exacerbated stress that accompanies living in a constant state of survival, fear, anxiety.

“ Things that make the educational experience different is that someone who is experiencing homelessness while trying to pursue an education will be more worried about the outcome at the end of the day, like food and shelter, and without those things, it’s likely that their interest in school would be pushed to the back of their mind while they focus more on surviving by the day.

— YOUNG ADULT SURVEY RESPONDENT

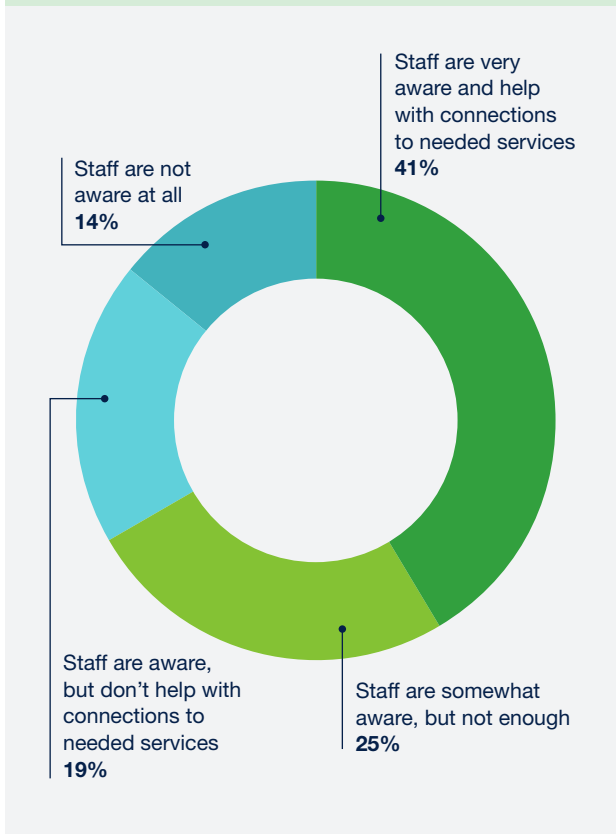
“ The lack of stability makes it hard to focus on my education because I have other things to worry about that are more important. Like where am I sleeping tonight, how can I even get to school, finding a job.

— YOUNG ADULT SURVEY RESPONDENT

“Many times, students facing homelessness or housing insecurities are not in the right mental or emotional state of mind to even start thinking about academics for the day. They are worried about where they are going to sleep that night, are they safe, will they have enough food, can they wash their clothes, do their friends know, etc.

— PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY RESPONDENT

FIGURE 6 School Staff Awareness of the Needs of Students and Families Experiencing Homelessness



SCHOOL STAFF AND SYSTEMS SUPPORT

Less than half of *Young adult & Parent/Guardian Survey* respondents felt that people who work in schools are very aware of the needs of students and families experiencing homelessness and help connect them to needed services (Figure 6).

When asked if they or their children had interacted with a Homeless Education Liaison in their school, over a quarter (28%) of respondents reported, “Yes, they help with support and connection to needed services.” Another quarter (27%) reported, “No, I don’t know what they do,” and 24% were unsure or did not know, indicating an area of growth for schools to increase awareness.

The most commonly reported form of support that survey respondents had received from the Homeless Liaison or others at their or their children’s school was school supplies (25%). One-fifth (21%) of all survey respondents reported not receiving any support from the Homeless Liaison or others at their or their child’s (ren) school, and 17% reported that they didn’t know or were unsure whether they had received support. One respondent noted, “Offered support with a counselor for our kid but was too little too late... too much take to cut through and not enough help.”

Survey respondents reported experiencing a wide range of barriers when accessing services through school, including:

- Not knowing that there are available services (57%),
- Not knowing how to access available services (39%),
- Being afraid of what others may think (29%),
- Not wanting schools to know they are experiencing homelessness (24%), and
- Not wanting to disclose traumatic life experiences to avoid being stigmatized or labeled as “problematic” (18%).

Moreover, only 6% of survey respondents reported that people can be easily connected to services, underscoring the barriers in place for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness trying to access resources through their schools.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

When asked, “*What is the most helpful or important thing schools can do to support youth or families experiencing homelessness?*,” the majority of young adult (62%) and parent/guardian (65%) comments focused on the provision of essential resources/supports (e.g., clothing, food, supplies) and/or information on McKinney-Vento rights and services as the most important things schools could do. Over one-quarter (27%) of parents/guardians and 15% of young adults emphasized the importance of school staff connecting with young people experiencing housing instability and showing them kindness and support.

Respondents shared their thoughts on how schools could better support students experiencing homelessness. Several felt schools should provide specific resources, like food or clothing, connecting families to housing, and parenting classes for parents/guardians.

“*Help families get connected with better housing resources.*”

— PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY RESPONDENT

“*To continue having opportunities/ options for the kids to get clothing or food like every other child in their school.*”

— PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY RESPONDENT

Others felt that schools should provide more encouragement, let students know that schools are a safe place for them, and meet with them individually to understand their specific circumstances.

“*To listen and be more understanding of the barriers we face because we are homeless. That it is not as easy as just showing up to school.*”

— YOUNG ADULT SURVEY RESPONDENT

“*I think the most helpful and important thing schools can do to support the homeless youth is to be supportive and non-judgmental, and outreach to them, and make them feel like they are not being judged or stigmatized.*”

— YOUNG ADULT SURVEY RESPONDENT



ARP-HCY Evaluation: Summary of Findings and Recommendations



In July 2021, the California Department of Education (CDE) received \$98.7 million in American Rescue Plan - Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funding to identify and support the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness throughout the state.

The funds had to be expended by September 30, 2024.² The CDE contracted with the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) School Health Evaluation and Research Team to evaluate the overall ARP-HCY funding program implementation from June 1, 2023, through September 15, 2024. The evaluation utilized surveys, interviews, program tracking logs, and secondary analysis of program and fiscal data to document the reach and short-term outcomes of the program.

ARP-HCY PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND REACH

Homeless Education Technical Assistance Centers (HETACs)

Three county offices of education (COE) received \$4.5 million annually to serve as HETAC leads and provide technical assistance (TA) and training to local education agencies (LEA) and other COEs statewide. The HETACs hosted two statewide conferences with over 1,150 attendees, launched a website with over 65,000 views, hosted over 20 webinars with more than 2,700 participants, and developed 12 resources/guides to help COEs and LEAs conduct their homeless liaison work.

COE Homeless Education Coordinators reported their confidence in all topic areas of the McKinney-Vento Assistance Act, which protects educational rights of students experiencing homelessness,^{3,4} increased because of the support provided by the HETACs. Some of the largest increases were reported by COE Coordinators' in their confidence to resolve disputes regarding educational enrollment, eligibility, and school selection for students experiencing homelessness (from 55% reporting their confidence increased due to the HETACs' support in Year 2 to 91% in Year 3) and reviewing/using data to target TA and monitoring (from 58% to 91%).

Homeless Innovative Programs (HIPs)

Twenty LEAs with proven innovative practices received HIP grants totaling \$8.9 million to disseminate their best practices to the field. Over the two years of funding, the 20 HIP grantees made over 200 presentations to nearly 14,000 individuals at local, statewide, and national conferences. Nearly all (97-98%) respondents to a post-presentation survey agreed that the strategies presented were innovative and new, included clear action steps, and were feasible to implement. Many (84%) reported that they or their LEAs were likely to implement the practices or strategies they learned about in the near future.

ARP-HCY I and II

Most of California's ARP-HCY funds were directed to 120 LEAs that received \$18.5 million through ARP-HCY I funding and 672 LEAs that received \$55.5 million in ARP-HCY II funding to facilitate the identification, enrollment, attendance, and success in school for youth experiencing homelessness. ARP-HCY I and II Recipients reported spending their funds on school supplies, clothing, transportation, and other resources to support students' basic needs. The flexibility of the funds to pay for these resources was a significant and unique benefit, as most other available funding sources, such as federal McKinney-Vento Act Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) grants, could not be used for these purposes. Most ARP-HCY I and II recipients reported in surveys and interviews that they would have to dramatically scale back or end their work supporting students experiencing homelessness when the ARP-HCY funding ended. An overwhelming 81% of ARP-HCY I and II Recipient survey respondents said they were concerned about their LEA having sufficient resources to support students' needs in the coming 2024-25 school year.



EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The ARP-HCY evaluation findings demonstrate the vast efforts of the CDE, HETACs, HIPs, and ARP I/II Recipient LEAs throughout the state to serve youth experiencing homelessness with the ARP-HCY funding. Approximately 4% (n=246,480) of California's public school students experienced homelessness in the 2022-2023 school year.¹ This represented a 10% increase (22,300 students) from the previous school year due to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

The need for dedicated, ongoing funding to support youth experiencing homelessness is clear. Based on the ARP-HCY evaluation findings, and surveys conducted with young adults and parent/ guardians experiencing homelessness on their perspectives of how schools can better support them, we offer the following suggestions for the CDE and their partners to better serve youth and families in the state experiencing homelessness.

Increase Dedicated Federal Funding and Establish Dedicated State-Level Funding

While these evaluation findings demonstrated that the ARP-HCY funds addressed critical needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, challenges persist even as these funds expired and the pandemic receded. LEA Homeless Education Liaisons across the state expressed concerns about meeting students' academic and social-emotional needs once ARP-HCY funding ends. To address these ongoing challenges, we propose increasing dedicated, ongoing federal and state funding to support students, particularly by expanding the federal EHCY program budget and establishing dedicated funding at the state level. These enhanced resources would enable LEAs to fulfill the mandated legal objectives of the McKinney -Vento Act that ensure the rights and protections for youth experiencing homelessness to have equal access and educational success comparable to their stably-housed peers. Federal and state funding would also allow LEAs to allocate more staff time and resources to homeless liaisons, many of whom currently juggle multiple roles and have limited capacity to meet student needs. Many young adult and parent/ guardian survey respondents shared that they were not familiar with the liaison or supports they could provide, demonstrating the need to increase their presence and capacity to be available to students in need. Finally, funding would support them to receive additional training, TA, and resources, and in turn train other school personnel, to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness, connect them with necessary academic, social, and emotional supports, and link them to essential community services. By investing in these areas, we can better support youth and help break the cycle of homelessness through education.

Allow for Flexible Funding to Meet Diverse and Complex Needs

In this evaluation, the COE Coordinators and LEA Liaisons stressed the need for more comprehensive and flexible support, including unrestricted funds, to meet students' immediate and essential needs outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act. These needs include transportation to support school attendance, access to immunizations and medical appointments, school supplies, clothing, and food, and connections to housing organizations. Students also need access to direct services that could be school site-based, including case management and mental health services. California's LEAs should work to foster strong partnerships between schools, districts, and outside agencies to ensure the provision of these comprehensive supports for students and their families. CDE's collaboration at the state level through the California Interagency Council on Homelessness and the California Interagency Coordinating Council helps to assure that multiple state agency representatives support California's students experiencing homelessness.

Sustain Statewide, Regional, and Local Technical Assistance

The evaluation findings point to the benefits of sustaining the support provided by the HETACs, including providing training and TA to LEAs, the continued hosting of the HETAC website, and the delivery of a statewide in-person conference. The HIP grantees also emphasized the importance of providing direct, in-person, hands-on TA and training to equip school staff to better support youth experiencing homelessness. The ARP-HCY funding period was too short to allow for implementation and evaluation of innovative practices; more time was needed to allow HIP grantees to provide one-on-one TA to LEAs that needed ongoing support to implement the innovative practices. There is a need to continue to share and disseminate best practices, such as those identified through the HIPs, through the HETAC work. Continuing and expanding not only statewide professional development and TA but also more targeted local support would help to ensure that schools are equipped to meet student and family needs.



Improve Identification and Outreach

The ARP-HCY funds allowed LEAs to invest staff and resources into innovative and proven best practices to identify students experiencing homelessness. However, young adults and parents/guardians surveyed through this evaluation reported that schools should do even more to conduct outreach and better advertise available services. To continue to improve the effective identification of students experiencing homelessness, LEAs need ongoing funding to implement and expand public education campaigns, continuous staff training due to high staff turnover, direct outreach to families, and partnerships with community organizations, with an emphasis on unaccompanied children, youth and families experiencing homelessness. This multi-faceted approach will help ensure that more students are promptly identified, their needs determined, and they are connected to appropriate services.

Evaluate Long-Term Impacts of Funding and Policy Changes

These implementation evaluation findings point to best practices and strategies that helped LEAs in California to better identify students experiencing homelessness and connect them with needed services and resources. However, a longer time frame for the evaluation would allow for an examination of how interventions such as those funded through the ARP-HCY impact student success, including not only attending school regularly, but also achieving improved grades, graduation rates, and post-secondary opportunities. ■

For more information about the California Department of Education's Homeless Education Services, visit:

For questions, contact the Homeless Education Team:

For more information on the UCSF School Health Evaluation and Research Team, visit:



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REFERENCES

- 1 Homeless Enrollment by Dwelling Type - State (CA Dept of Education). Accessed August 17, 2024. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQCensus/HmlsEnrByDT.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=State&-year=2021-22&ListReportRows=Yr&charter=All&UY=All&Display=Pct&ro=1>
- 2 ARP-HCY State Plans. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Accessed March 7, 2024. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/american-rescue-plan/american-rescue-plan-elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-homeless-children-youth-arp-hcy/arp-hcy-state-plans>
- 3 McKinney-Vento Definition – National Center for Homeless Education. Accessed March 7, 2024. <https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition>
- 4 McKinney-Vento Act - California Homeless Education and Technical Assistance Center. Accessed February 16, 2024. <https://www.hetac.org/statutes/federal/mva>