



Investments to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

A Decade of Policy, A Decade of Progress in Washington State

Dion Burns, Jennifer A. Bland, Jonathan Kaplan, and Patrick M. Shields

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, the authors thank the numerous policymakers, advocates, program administrators, and district and program staff who shared their experiences and expertise with our research team. We are also deeply grateful to Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction for sharing the data set that facilitated some of our student outcomes analyses. We thank our Learning Policy Institute (LPI) colleagues Nicole Arshan, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Stacy Loewe for their vital analytic support and thoughtful feedback on earlier drafts of this report. In addition, we thank the members of the LPI Communications team for their invaluable support in designing, producing, and disseminating this report.

This research was supported by the Raikes Foundation. Additional core operating support for LPI is provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Sandler Foundation, Skyline Foundation, and MacKenzie Scott. We are grateful to them for their generous support. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

External Reviewers

This report benefited from the insights and expertise of two external reviewers: Barbara Duffield, Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection, and Jennifer Erb-Downward, Director of Housing Stability Programs and Policy Initiatives at Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan. We thank them for the care and attention they gave the report.

Suggested citation: Burns, D., Bland, J. A., Kaplan, J., & Shields, P. M. (2026). *Investments to support students experiencing homelessness: A decade of policy, a decade of progress in Washington state*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/451.802>

This report can be found online at <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/wa-state-policy-support-students-homelessness>.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.



Document last revised September 4, 2026

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	iv
Introduction	1
Scope and Academic Implications of Student Homelessness	1
Federal Funding to Support the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness.....	3
Additional State Funding and the Special Case of Washington State.....	4
Report Overview.....	5
Washington’s Homeless Student Stability Programs	6
Washington’s Policy Ecosystem to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness	6
Origin and Development of the Homeless Student Stability Programs	9
Structure of the Homeless Student Stability Programs: Bridging Education and Housing.....	12
Understanding the Scale and Scope of State-Level Funding.....	14
How Washington’s Homeless Student Stability Programs Support Students Experiencing Homelessness.....	19
District Efforts to Improve Identification.....	19
District Services, Supports, and Resources via Blended and Braided Funds.....	20
Partnerships With Community Organizations	22
State-Level Administration and Support	25
Student Outcomes and the Role of State-Level Funding.....	28
Identification	29
School Stability	31
Attendance	34
Exclusionary Discipline.....	36
Graduation Rates.....	37
Interpreting Student Outcomes.....	40
Data and Funding Implications	42
Using Data for Analysis and Improvement.....	42
Sustainable Funding to Support Students	42
Lessons and Policy Considerations	45
State Implementation.....	45
Local Implementation.....	49

Appendix A: Research Methods and Model Results	51
Appendix B: Allowable Uses of Federal and State Program Funds.....	56
Endnotes	58
About the Authors	65

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1	Washington’s Homeless Student Stability Programs: Policy Development Timeline, 2014–Present	7
Figure 2	Statewide HSSP and HSSEP Appropriations and Federal McKinney-Vento Appropriations to Washington State by Year, 2016–17 to 2025–26	15
Figure 3	Number of Washington Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness, 2014–15 to 2023–24.....	29
Figure 4	Percentage of Low-Income Washington Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness, by District Grantee Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24.....	31
Figure 5	Percentage of Washington Students Experiencing Homelessness Who Changed Schools During the School Year, 2015–16 and 2023–24	32
Figure 6	Estimated Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness Changing Schools During the School Year in Funded vs. Unfunded Districts, 2017–18 to 2023–24.....	33
Figure 7	Percentage of Washington Students With Regular Attendance, by Homelessness Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24	35
Figure 8	Percentage of Washington Students Subject to Exclusionary Discipline, by Homelessness Status, 2017–18 to 2023–24	37
Figure 9	Washington State 4-Year and 5-Year High School Graduation Rates, by Homelessness Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24	38
Figure 10	Number of Students in the 5-Year Graduating Cohort Who Experienced Homelessness During High School, 2014–15 to 2023–24.....	39
Table 1	Homeless Student Stability Program Grant Details by Year, 2017–2025.....	16
Table 2	Homeless Student Stability Education Program Grant Details by Year, 2016–17 to 2024–25.....	17
Table 3	ARP-HCY, McKinney-Vento, and HSSEP District Grantee Counts and Award Sizes	18

Executive Summary

Student homelessness is a substantial and growing problem across the United States. More than 3% of all U.S. PreK–12 students were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2023–24—a proportion that research suggests is almost certainly an undercount. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, students experiencing homelessness across the United States have the right to “equal access to the same free, appropriate public education ... as provided to other children and youths.” Still, grant funding under the act is very limited, and the experience of homelessness affects student learning in numerous ways that impede equitable access or outcomes.

Washington is one of relatively few states providing state funding over and above federal funds to support students experiencing homelessness. Washington’s supports are especially notable because they are designed to complement one another, addressing student challenges from multiple angles. Central to these efforts are Washington’s two Homeless Student Stability programs, established in 2016. One, the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP), consists of grants to housing-focused community-based organizations to help families secure stable housing, working collaboratively with school districts; the other, the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP), consists of grants to school districts and is intended to improve student identification and support, with an emphasis on community partnerships. This report focuses on the efforts of these two programs to improve educational stability for students experiencing homelessness by bridging education and housing supports.

Policy Context and Policy Development

Washington’s Homeless Student Stability programs feature prominently within a broader ecosystem of state policies and programs to address student and youth homelessness. Especially notable developments include the 2015 creation of the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) within the state Department of Commerce, as well as a 2019 requirement that each public school designates a building-level point of contact—in addition to the McKinney-Vento–mandated district liaison—to identify students experiencing homelessness and help them access supports. In 2026, the state passed further legislation to codify federal McKinney-Vento protections into state law.

The origin of Washington’s Homeless Student Stability programs involved numerous constituencies, including legal advocates, direct service and policy organizations, political leaders, and state agencies. Advocates made compelling arguments in favor of the legislation by highlighting how other groups of disadvantaged students or youth, including students in foster care and those involved with the juvenile justice system, had built-in adult advocates and state-level offices with responsibility for program oversight. Advocates also ensured there was a focus on supports beyond transportation logistics and costs to include issues like housing stability that cannot be addressed through federal McKinney-Vento funds. Framing the authorizing legislation around opportunity gaps and incorporating the voices of youth with lived experience of homelessness also helped engage legislators. Importantly, both HSSP and HSSEP use the more inclusive McKinney-Vento homelessness definition (compared to that used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), which includes the many families living in doubled-up arrangements, hotels, and motels—enabling these families to access housing services that would not be available under more restrictive criteria.

Program Structure, Funding, and Implementation

HSSP grants predominantly support housing navigation and case management for participating students and families, as well as direct short-term financial assistance to pay expenses that can help families secure stable housing. Between 2017 and 2025, individual grants were administered to between 5 and 14 community housing organizations in a given year. During the 2023–25 state legislative biennium, the median grant award was around \$200,000, making HSSP a relatively intensive program for a small subset of families. According to data from the nonprofit HSSP technical assistance provider Building Changes, HSSP-supported housing programs served approximately 1,049 families between 2022 and 2025.

HSSEP grant funds are frequently used to subsidize the salary of a district homeless liaison and fund training for building-level points of contact. HSSEP funds are also used to partially fund a range of student supports, including direct academic supports, such as tutoring; physical resources like clothing, food, and hygiene items; wraparound supports such as case management and contracts with community-based providers to address broader needs; employment supports; and enrichment activities like tutoring. Due to resource constraints, grantee districts have frequently focused more intensive supports on smaller subsets of students exhibiting particular academic or behavioral risk factors. HSSEP has substantially increased the reach of targeted district funding to address student homelessness, which was previously limited to McKinney-Vento grantees. From 2016–17 to 2024–25, between 12 and 49 districts—serving 16% to 54% of students experiencing homelessness statewide—received program funding per school year. In 2024–25, the median HSSEP grant was just under \$47,000.

By incentivizing collaboration and creating shared goals across housing organizations and school districts, the Homeless Student Stability programs bridge two otherwise separate sets of entities. Each has its own funding sources and organizational structures; both are important to establishing student stability and setting up students to succeed academically. At the state level, leaders and staff from OHY and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) have worked to develop a shared understanding of the other agency’s relevant practices, systems, and constraints, with relationships and knowledge deepening over time. At the local level, district–community partnerships have enabled grantee district staff to connect students and their families through warm handoffs to resources and services beyond those the district itself could provide. Additional state-level support from Building Changes has helped OHY and OSPI bridge districts and housing partners, including via a robust community of practice structure.

OHY and OSPI have also each added staff and expanded their organizational capacity since the Homeless Student Stability programs were introduced. At OSPI, this has also enabled an increased focus on non-grantee districts, resulting in improved supports statewide for students experiencing homelessness.

Student Outcomes

Analyses using both publicly available state-level data and individual student-level administrative data point to improvements in some educational outcomes since the Homeless Student Stability programs began. To study school mobility and attendance, we used a quantitatively rigorous method to match samples of students experiencing homelessness inside and outside of grantee districts. Findings from these data, together with interviews with district homeless liaisons and state program personnel, suggest

that Washington has seen meaningful improvements in some outcomes for students experiencing homelessness since the inception of HSSP and HSSEP, although substantial disparities remain. Key findings include the following:

- **Improvements in Identification of Students Experiencing Homelessness.** Between 2014–15 and 2023–24, the statewide number of students identified as experiencing homelessness increased by over 40%, with larger identification rate increases in grantee districts. Although worsening economic conditions may be a factor, interviews strongly suggest that at least part of this increase is attributable to improvements in identification processes and procedures.
- **Statewide Improvements in High School Graduation Rates for Students Experiencing Homelessness.** Between 2014–15 and 2023–24, the 4-year high school graduation rate for students experiencing homelessness increased by 10 percentage points—nearly double the percentage point increase for stably housed students over the same period.
- **Improvements in School and Home Stability.** Between 2015–16 and 2023–24, statewide, the proportion of students experiencing homelessness who moved schools at least once during the school year decreased by more than 30%. Further, students in districts that received HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funding were significantly less likely to move schools during the school year than similar students experiencing homelessness in non-grantee districts—a key finding, given that increased stability is a core intention of state funding. In addition, for families served by HSSP between 2022 and 2025, Building Changes data reveal that nearly 60% exited into permanent housing.

We did not find meaningful statewide improvements in rates of regular attendance for students experiencing homelessness relative to their stably housed peers, although some individual HSSEP grantee districts did show improvement. Similarly, statewide patterns in exclusionary discipline rates showed a decrease for all students post-COVID-19, with only a small decrease in disparities between students experiencing homelessness and stably housed students.

When interpreting Washington’s student outcome data, it is important to recall that more intensive services were generally only available for small subsets of students experiencing homelessness, whereas analyses looked at all students experiencing homelessness in districts receiving HSSEP or McKinney-Vento funds. Without more precise data tracking that identifies which students received which services, additional positive effects for this small subset of students could be muted by outcomes for the full set of students experiencing homelessness.

These findings illustrate what may be achieved with a relatively modest investment that supplements McKinney-Vento funds. Still, serious challenges remain, suggesting that these funds may have been necessary but were not nearly sufficient to meet the needs of the entire statewide population of students experiencing homelessness. Staff in grantee districts explained that additional funding could increase the dedicated staff time needed to support this population.

The availability of more funds could also allow some of the funding to be disbursed via formula, reaching students experiencing homelessness in districts that currently do not receive competitive grant funds. However, the scale of the challenge presently exceeds the available resources. The less than \$5 million

total annual investment through HSSP and HSSEP is far lower than the \$28.6 million annual investment that, in 2019, the Washington state auditor's office determined was needed to more fully identify and address the needs of students experiencing homelessness statewide.

Lessons and Policy Considerations

Washington's experience offers numerous lessons for actors in other states interested in investing in supporting students experiencing homelessness.

State Implementation

- Build capacity in the state education agency to support students experiencing homelessness.
- Because student homelessness is a multifaceted challenge with root causes and solutions that reach far beyond the education system, consider placing oversight responsibility for certain broader issues related to student, family, and youth homelessness outside the state education agency.
- Foster explicit early and ongoing cross-agency coordination to successfully administer programs like Washington's that aim to address student homelessness from multiple angles.
- Anticipate an increase in the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness. This will likely be due—at least in part—to more accurate measurement of an already-occurring problem, rather than an automatic signal of worsening conditions.
- Use robust and precise data tracking to accurately identify program impacts at the district and state levels, with technical assistance support around data tracking and use.
- Build state legislation to align with McKinney-Vento, enabling coherence across the various policies designed to support students and families experiencing homelessness.
- Consider avenues to increase the scale and enhance the sustainability of funding to more fully meet the needs of the total statewide population of students experiencing homelessness.

Local Implementation

- Build strong district–community partnerships. In Washington, community partners have played a crucial role in providing direct resources, referrals, and resource navigation, as well as in initial and ongoing policy advocacy.
- Establish and support building-level points of contact for students and families experiencing homelessness—a powerful lever for increasing identification and addressing student needs.
- Enable dedicated time for district homeless liaisons to fulfill their extensive responsibilities.
- Blend and braid funds to support students experiencing homelessness.

Introduction

Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, students experiencing homelessness across the United States have the right to “equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.”¹ However, grant funding under the act is very limited, and around a third of all students identified as experiencing homelessness nationwide are in districts that receive no McKinney-Vento funding.² The state of Washington is one of relatively few states that provide any funding over and above federal McKinney-Vento funds to support students experiencing homelessness, and Washington’s experience offers meaningful lessons for personnel in other states looking to implement analogous supports.

The state of Washington is one of relatively few states that provide any funding over and above federal McKinney-Vento funds to support students experiencing homelessness.

This report describes Washington’s policies and programs to support students experiencing homelessness, with a primary focus on two complementary grant programs: the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP), which funds nonprofit community organizations that work with a subset of families of students experiencing homelessness to help secure stable housing, and the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP), which funds districts to support students’ educational needs. Each of the grants is designed to foster collaboration between school districts and nonprofit organizations to support students and their families experiencing homelessness.

The report describes how these programs built on federal policy to support students experiencing homelessness, how the programs came to be, how they work, why they matter, and what lessons they offer to other states. The findings we present are based on a set of interviews with key state and local policy and program personnel; extensive review of legislative and policy documents; and preliminary quantitative analyses of state datasets on the outcomes of students experiencing homelessness in Washington. We begin this introductory section by describing the scale and implications of student homelessness across the United States. We then discuss the landscape for federal and state funding for students experiencing homelessness and situate Washington within that landscape. The section concludes with a more detailed overview of the remainder of the report.

Scope and Academic Implications of Student Homelessness

Student homelessness is a substantial and growing problem across the United States. Data from the National Center for Homeless Education show that more than 1.5 million students in grades PreK–12 were identified as experiencing homelessness in 2023–24.³ This is equivalent to more than 3% of all students nationally, or around 1 in every 31 students. Yet research suggests that even this number is almost certainly an undercount.⁴

Homelessness affects students from all backgrounds and communities, although some groups are disproportionately represented. For example, the proportion of students with disabilities is higher among students experiencing homelessness (20%) than among the general student population (15%).⁵ Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Pacific Islander students are also significantly overrepresented among students experiencing homelessness.⁶

The experience of homelessness affects student learning in many ways. First, regular school attendance can be a challenge. Students often experience periods of absenteeism from school, such as when families change living arrangements as they search for stable housing. Each new arrangement can require finding new ways to get to school, creating further absences. The experience of homelessness is also often accompanied by poverty and food insecurity, decreased access to health care and child care for younger siblings, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression,⁷ all of which can result in additional time away from school. Threats to student attendance can be further compounded for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, who face these same difficulties without the support of family members. Unaccompanied youth may also fear disclosing their status because they are unaware of legal protections they are entitled to under the law.

Second, although students experiencing homelessness have a right to remain in their school of origin even when their living arrangements change,⁸ for many students the realities of homelessness may result in a school change. Students may not only miss additional days of school as they reenroll and navigate new campuses and transportation arrangements, but each school move can also mean a change of classes, teachers, and curricula, which can result in gaps in learning. In addition, each school move can involve a loss of valuable teacher and peer relationships that have been demonstrated to support student well-being and learning.⁹

Third, even when attending school, students experiencing homelessness face additional challenges and may struggle to keep up with schoolwork. For example, unstable living arrangements mean that everyday activities, such as finding a quiet place to do homework, can be a challenge. The understandable stresses that arise from housing insecurity can be traumatic and may result in students who are experiencing homelessness having difficulty concentrating and keeping up with coursework. In some cases, these stresses can manifest as behavioral challenges, which can result in exclusionary discipline, causing further absences from school¹⁰—especially when teachers are unaware of a student’s situation.

For students experiencing homelessness, overcoming the many in- and out-of-school barriers to their successful participation in learning has been identified as especially important in breaking the cycle of future homelessness. A 2019 study identified the lack of a high school diploma or GED as the most significant factor in youth and young adults experiencing homelessness beyond school.¹¹ To address barriers to academic achievement and attainment, students experiencing homelessness require a range of educational supports in addition to supports related to housing and school stability. Effective policies and practices are needed to ensure these students are consistently identified and provided with the services and supports they need. Yet nationally and at the state level, targeted funding to support these efforts is not nearly sufficient to meet the demonstrated level of need.

Federal Funding to Support the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

The federal Department of Education provides limited federal funding to support students experiencing homelessness through two principal programs: the McKinney-Vento Act and the Title I, Part A Reserve. A third funding source—the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) fund—was available from 2021 to 2024 to aid with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these sources, however, has limitations when it comes to supporting students experiencing homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines what it means for a student to be regarded as homeless—“individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence”—and sets out student rights and district responsibilities.¹² In contrast with the less inclusive definition of homelessness typically used by organizations that receive funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—including many public housing agencies, nonprofit organizations, and emergency shelters—the McKinney-Vento Act definition also includes families that are staying temporarily in motels or hotels or living doubled up due to loss of housing or economic hardship.¹³ The act requires that all school districts staff a homeless liaison whose role involves identifying students experiencing homelessness; ensuring their enrollment in school; providing referrals to social and educational services; and training school-level staff to further support identification, among other responsibilities.¹⁴ Districts are also required to provide transportation to school for students experiencing homelessness when it is in their best interest to stay in the same school, regardless of where the student is currently staying.

The McKinney-Vento Act provides funds to states (\$129 million nationally in 2024),¹⁵ which distribute those funds to districts—typically through a competitive grant program. Most districts with students experiencing homelessness do not receive federal grants—and approximately one third of all students experiencing homelessness nationwide are in districts that receive no McKinney-Vento funding¹⁶—but students are still entitled to the rights under the act. Thus, for many districts, the McKinney-Vento Act represents an underfunded mandate. Even in those districts that do receive funding, grants are often barely sufficient to fund the liaison position, leaving little in the way of funds to directly support students and families experiencing homelessness.

Title I, Part A Reserve

The second main form of federal support is Title I, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Under ESSA, districts are required to reserve funds for students experiencing homelessness. These funds may be, but are not required to be, “determined based on a needs assessment of homeless children and youths in the local educational agency, taking into consideration the number and needs of homeless children and youths.”¹⁷ However, federal law does not specify a set amount to be set aside, and we have little information on the degree to which districts keep funds in reserve for their population of students experiencing homelessness, since reporting was not required until the 2022–23 school year and has yet to be publicly reported by the federal government.

American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY)

In 2021, recognizing the vulnerability of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government passed the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act. This legislation included \$800 million in funding to states to support students experiencing homelessness (ARP-HCY)—an amount more than 6 times that of the annual McKinney-Vento funding. The impact of this funding was substantial. In Washington, 143 unique of the state’s approximately 300 districts received one-time ARP-HCY grants—a far larger share than the 19 to 38 districts that have received McKinney-Vento funding in any given year. However, ARP-HCY was one-time funding that has since expired.

Additional State Funding and the Special Case of Washington State

Despite the limitations of federal funding, relatively few states provide any state-level funding directly for students experiencing homelessness. Some funds are targeted to address specific areas of need that arise for these students, and others are more flexibly allocated to support a broader range of student needs. For example, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New York provide funds specifically for transportation expenses.¹⁸ Maine initiated a pilot program in 2023 to help prevent students from experiencing homelessness, providing up to \$750 per student that can be used for emergency needs like housing assistance, utilities, or home repairs that could prevent eviction.¹⁹ New York provides a limited amount of funding to support the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness. Colorado has instituted a grant program to support the educational stability of highly mobile students (including those experiencing homelessness), Maryland has initiated a program to provide emergency financial support to students and families at risk of homelessness, and New Mexico has launched a pilot program to support attendance.²⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, California made a significant investment in flexible-use funding, with allocations of \$1,000 per student experiencing homelessness, although these were one-time-only funds and have since expired.²¹

The state of Washington is one of the relatively few states that have enacted supportive programs and policies specifically to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness and has been doing so for the past decade. Washington’s supports for students experiencing homelessness are especially notable because they are designed to complement each other, addressing student challenges from multiple angles. Central to these efforts are HSSP and HSSEP, collectively referred to as the “Homeless Student Stability programs.” The programs serve complementary roles:

- HSSP is a grant program for community-based organizations working with families to secure stable housing and requires partnerships with school districts.
- HSSEP is a grant program for school districts that supports and builds on the work of district homeless liaisons to support the educational needs of students experiencing homelessness and is designed to foster connections with community-based organizations, including those focused on housing supports.

This approach makes the Washington case unique and may provide lessons for other states seeking to implement their own programs.

Report Overview

This report describes the development, implementation, and implications of Washington's statewide efforts to support students experiencing homelessness, with particular focus on the Homeless Student Stability programs (HSSP and HSSEP). The report begins by summarizing the programs and contextualizing them among the constellation of state policies and practices that support students experiencing homelessness. The subsequent sections detail the origins of Washington's efforts, explain the nature and scale of the supports and services provided by the Homeless Student Stability programs, and describe program implementation. These findings are based on interviews with key actors from school districts, state agencies, nonprofit direct service and advocacy organizations, and the legislative and philanthropic communities, together with extensive review of legislative and policy documents. The report also presents changes in student outcomes associated with the programs using quantitative analyses of state education data. (Further details on data collection and analytic methods are described in [Appendix A.](#)) The report concludes by examining funding adequacy relative to need and discussing policy and practice implications for other states seeking to replicate or adapt Washington's efforts, focusing on considerations related to state-level program oversight and coordination as well as local implementation.

Washington's Homeless Student Stability Programs

Washington's Homeless Student Stability programs—the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) and the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP)—feature prominently within a broader ecosystem of state policies and programs to address student and youth homelessness. This section of the report introduces the Homeless Student Stability programs and the policy context in which they operate, describes how the programs were developed, and details how the programs are structured and funded.

Washington's Policy Ecosystem to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Over the past dozen years, Washington has passed several notable pieces of legislation to support students experiencing homelessness, both prior to and following the establishment of the HSSP/HSSEP programs. [Figure 1](#) provides an overview of key legislative milestones, with further elaboration in the subsequent text.

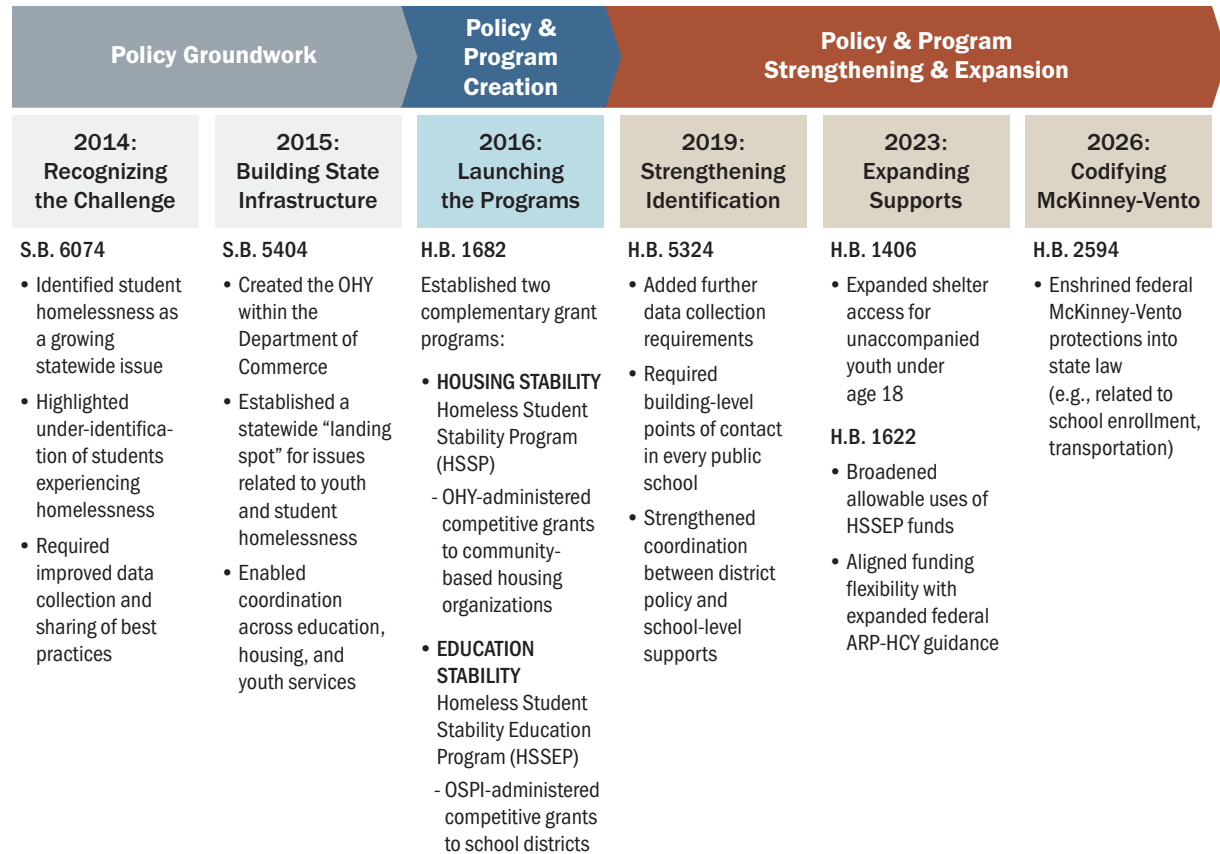
Legislation Laying the Groundwork for the Homeless Student Stability Programs

A key initial step in developing Washington's student homelessness policy ecosystem was the 2014 passage of S.B. 6074,²² which identified student homelessness as an increasing statewide challenge and noted that many students experiencing homelessness were not being identified. In response to this challenge and to improve students' educational outcomes, S.B. 6074 created requirements for improved data collection from school districts and mandated improvements in the distribution of information and best practices to school districts concerning how to support this student population. Notably, data collected in accordance with this legislation could be disaggregated by legislative district, which one interviewee identified as valuable in the advocacy process for subsequent legislation.

In 2015, the Washington legislature passed S.B. 5404,²³ which created the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) within the Department of Commerce. This was a key step, establishing a state agency with responsibility for students who otherwise could fall between systems that are governed by often-conflicting definitions and funding requirements. Interviewees for this study who were involved in S.B. 5404 advocacy and/or implementation explained that establishing OHY was a crucial precursor to the establishment of the Homeless Student Stability programs because it created a landing spot for issues related to students experiencing homelessness. Because student homelessness is a multifaceted challenge whose root causes and solutions reach beyond the education system, OHY provided a place to address issues related to student homelessness that might otherwise have fallen through the cracks. As one interviewee explained, the establishment of OHY created “a lot of leverage for the office to engage in ... policy spaces, policy development, shaping solutions, in ways that not every state agency or program is engaged in.”

The state subsequently created several grant programs to support youth experiencing homelessness. The programs, which were focused on youth and young adults age 12 to 24—including, but not limited to, students—were situated within OHY. More recently, OHY has expanded its scope to include a focus on upstream prevention of homelessness, focusing on youth who are exiting the juvenile justice system, the foster system, or institutional medical care.

**Figure 1. Washington’s Homeless Student Stability Programs:
Policy Development Timeline, 2014–Present**



Note: ARP-HCY = American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth; OHY = Office of Homeless Youth; OSPI = Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2026).

Legislation Establishing the Homeless Student Stability Programs

The state legislature established the Homeless Student Stability programs in 2016 via H.B. 1682.²⁴ This legislation, titled the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act, designed the two grant programs (HSSP and HSSEP) to be complementary, aiming to improve outcomes for students experiencing homelessness through both improved housing stability and improved educational stability and educational supports. HSSP is administered by OHY and provides competitive grants to housing-focused, community-based organizations that provide more intensive services, including case management and direct short-term financial assistance, to improve housing stability for a subset of students experiencing homelessness and their families. The HSSEP is administered by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI; Washington’s state education agency) and provides competitive grants to districts to improve the identification of students experiencing homelessness and improve district capacity to support these students’ educational needs. Both programs explicitly seek to promote cross-organizational collaboration between districts and community-based organizations. The HSSP grant requires that

community housing providers work alongside districts through memoranda of understanding, and the award criteria for both grants advantages districts and community-based organizations that have formed partnerships with each other for housing support as well as other services.

Subsequent Legislation to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

Since establishing the Homeless Student Stability programs in 2016, the Washington state legislature has passed additional laws that added and adjusted supports for students experiencing homelessness. For example:

- S.B. 5324 (2019): Required building-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness and established further data collection requirements.
- H.B. 1622 (2023): Broadened the scope of allowable services and supports under HSSEP.
- H.B. 1406 (2023): Facilitated access to shelters for unaccompanied homeless youth under age 18.
- H.B. 2594 (2026): Codified federal McKinney-Vento protections into state law.²⁵

Mandating building-level points of contact in addition to the district homeless liaisons is not strictly required by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act but is regarded as an effective practice that can increase identification and improve coherence between district policies and on-the-ground supports.²⁶ Specifically, research finds that when staff at the school level are able to improve outreach to families and build a culture of trust and support, identification improves, and families are more likely to be referred to and access resources.²⁷

This mandate is just one of several ways in which Washington’s state policies build directly on the structures and practices set forth by McKinney-Vento. Another example is that both HSSP and HSSEP use the more inclusive McKinney-Vento criteria for defining homelessness, rather than the narrower “literal homelessness” criteria of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition. These differences in definitions have long complicated efforts for the many students living in doubled-up arrangements to access HUD dollars and services that could help their families achieve stable housing. Additionally, HSSEP grants—which, like McKinney-Vento subgrants, are provided to districts to improve identification and support of students experiencing homelessness—are explicitly designed to supplement and not replace McKinney-Vento. Moreover, in 2026, Washington lawmakers codified McKinney-Vento protections, ensuring they would be maintained for Washington students experiencing homelessness even in the event of changes to federal law.

HSSEP grants are explicitly designed to supplement and not replace McKinney-Vento.

Further, HSSEP has allowed for flexibility in the use of funds. The authorizing legislation was originally written to match the allowable use provisions in McKinney-Vento.²⁸ Later, when the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) program expanded allowable uses of funds (for example, permitting districts to purchase physical infrastructure such as washing machines and dryers for student use), Washington followed suit by likewise expanding allowable uses for HSSEP funds.²⁹ These included

expenses not previously permitted under McKinney-Vento, such as for short-term housing, basic needs (e.g., store cards, hygiene products), employment supports, and wraparound supports via community-based organizations. (See [Appendix B](#) for more details.)

Origin and Development of the Homeless Student Stability Programs

The genesis of Washington’s Homeless Student Stability programs provides insights into the combined role of numerous constituencies—including legal advocates, direct service and policy organizations, political leaders, and state agencies—in state policy development. Details on the origin of the legislation also illuminate some of the arguments and strategies identified by key actors as especially compelling. These insights may be particularly useful for other states aiming to build more comprehensive systems of support for students experiencing homelessness.

Moving Beyond Lawsuits

Initial momentum for the Homeless Student Stability programs and the policies that surround them grew in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Representatives from a legal advocacy organization reported that organizations periodically brought enforcement actions against school districts to ensure proper implementation of the protections afforded to students under the McKinney-Vento Act. The discovery for these lawsuits illustrated the scale and scope of the challenges that students experiencing homelessness face in fully realizing their educational rights. As one former legal services advocate described:

I was stunned at how incredibly powerful the intent [of McKinney-Vento] was ... [but] with an enforcement mechanism that turned out to be pretty weak. What kept bubbling up to us when we were looking at this [is that it was] a systemic problem: Students experiencing homelessness weren’t getting an adequate education.

Thus, although the initial legal action sought to bring about change in specific cases and circumstances, it also highlighted the nature and extent of the associated systemic challenges. These included insufficient and inconsistent identification of students experiencing homelessness; inconsistent understanding of districts’ McKinney-Vento responsibilities, including transportation; and a siloing of schools, shelters, and housing organizations. Moreover, it became clear that while there were state-level offices with responsibility to support other disadvantaged students or youths—including students in foster care and those involved with the juvenile justice system—there was no such office working directly to address the challenges faced by the large and growing number of students identified as experiencing homelessness. Advocates argued that a new way forward was needed.

Using Data to Refocus the Conversation

To support the rationale that state legislation could help address the challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness, advocates worked to marshal evidence that better defined the scope of the challenge and proposed ways state support could be especially meaningful. Supported by philanthropic funds, members of multiple advocacy groups both within and outside Washington explored these issues.

One especially influential resource emerging from this research was a 2011 report, “Beds and Buses: How Affordable Housing Can Help Reduce Transportation Costs,” published by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in collaboration with Washington-based Columbia Legal Services.³⁰

The findings from the Beds and Buses report helped shift the conversation about support for students experiencing homelessness beyond an exclusive or predominant focus on transportation by establishing the value proposition of investing in housing stability. Because of the expenses associated with realizing students’ transportation rights to their schools of origin under McKinney-Vento, policy and practice conversations had tended to focus disproportionately on transportation logistics and costs. As one advocate explained, “Funding transportation is absolutely important. But those other services that [students and] families are eligible for also really need support.” In addition to finding that school moves associated with housing instability significantly impeded student learning and development, the report calculated that funds spent on improving housing stability for students could dramatically reduce the transportation costs that districts would incur if those students became homeless. This economic rationale directly informed the school district and community housing provider collaboration called for by the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act of 2016: “This paper proposes schools and communities work together to create more affordable housing to supplement exclusive reliance on McKinney-Vento transportation policies.”³¹

Disaggregating Needs Specific to Students Experiencing Homelessness

Another important step in securing targeted support was identifying the distinct needs and experiences of students experiencing homelessness compared to other student groups. Advocates explained that prior to the establishment of OHY in 2015 and of the HSSP and HSSEP programs in 2016, policymakers too frequently categorized students experiencing homelessness as subsets of other student groups. Explicitly separating students experiencing homelessness from the broader pool of students from low-income backgrounds, and separating unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness from students in foster care, helped advocates make the case that students experiencing homelessness had unique needs that required more targeted supports.

Interviewees described this latter distinction as especially illuminating for policymakers: Although both unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care are experiencing housing instability, students in the foster system had built-in adult advocates in ways that unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness did not. As one advocate explained:

To be fair, it’s not as if they had nailed it when it comes to foster youth educational issues. But there was at least an entity that we could go to and say, “These children are in your custody, legally and otherwise. What is your obligation when it comes to their education?”

Further, the identification challenges that exist with students experiencing homelessness did not exist in the foster system.

Framing the Issue

The naming of the 2016 authorizing legislation as the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act was also especially valuable in framing the issues at hand. Specifically, positioning the challenges that students experiencing homelessness face in the context of opportunity gaps helped advocates

communicate using terminology that was both familiar and compelling to legislators working on education-adjacent issues. As one advocate recalled, “You’re not going to close the opportunity gap ... unless you think about the housing stability.” That realization helped the issue gain traction in the legislature.

The Legislative Advocacy Process and the Elevated Role of Youth Voice

Grounded in the above arguments, several organizations and individuals worked in tandem to build toward legislation. Law students from the Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic at the University of Washington Law School worked alongside public interest lawyers to draft legislative text. Nonprofit organizations lent their support and advocacy, including building functional knowledge of the different agencies involved in program administration, so that the legislation could be written with agency needs and capacities in mind. As a result of this agency knowledge, for example, one interviewee explained:

It was written into the bill language that it would only pass if there was an FTE [full-time equivalent position at the state education agency] to administer the grants and oversee the program. ... And that ... allowed for better administration of the program, and better coordination at the state level, for a [separate] person to handle that program.

Support from philanthropic sources helped underwrite some of the initial and ongoing advocacy work and provided advocates with connections to ensure the conversation could be elevated to the appropriate places. Advocates from Columbia Legal Services led the charge, coordinating and facilitating involvement by partner organizations, creating a shared vision, and building trust among advocates working toward a common legislative goal.

Interviewees explained that advocacy from two sources was especially important in securing passage of the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Gap Act, as well as complementary legislation like that establishing OHY. First, youth with lived experience of homelessness humanized the issue for legislators. While adult advocates could formulate relevant arguments and share associated data, several of the advocates most deeply involved in the HSSP and HSSEP authorizing legislation emphasized the power of youth voice. One such advocate recalled:

Senators would call me and say, “You sent this young person to my office and she reminds me of my granddaughter.” ... We had legislators crying after these meetings. They realized, it’s somebody in my community. [It] shifted the discussion from “those kids” to “my kids.”

Understanding that the retelling of their homelessness stories could be traumatic for the students, several nonprofit organizers prepared students for the experience of speaking to lawmakers. As part of the process, adult advocates emphasized the importance of ensuring thoughtful, trauma-informed supports were in place. As one advocate explained, “PTSD is a real thing, and even though [the youth who were sharing their stories] knew they had accomplished something and felt good, it could trigger things.”

Additionally, policy development to support students experiencing homelessness in Washington benefited from strong support from the state’s first lady at the time, who helped elevate the issue with lawmakers. Interview participants recalled that with this combined advocacy, there was broad support for the legislation. What little opposition there was largely stemmed from concern that the federal government could also do more by increasing funding for McKinney-Vento programming. Ultimately, this did not impede lawmakers in moving forward with state-specific legislation.

Structure of the Homeless Student Stability Programs: Bridging Education and Housing

With its intent to improve student stability, the legislation establishing HSSP and HSSEP is consistent with research that underscores the role schools can play in supporting students.³² By simultaneously providing grants to community-based organizations, the programs also reflect research that shows schools alone cannot address the obstacles students face to their learning that arise from beyond the school walls.³³ Washington legislators thus took an important step by establishing that a primary goal of both programs is to “encourage the development and implementation of collaborative strategies between housing and education partners.”³⁴ By incentivizing this collaboration, legislators designed the programs to bridge two otherwise separate sets of entities—school districts and housing-focused community organizations—each with its own funding sources and organizational structures, but both important to establishing the home and school stability needed to keep students in school and set them up to succeed academically. Here we describe the structure of the two programs and how they are intended to work together.

HSSP Program Design

Administered by OHY within Washington’s Department of Commerce, HSSP is designed to promote housing stability among students experiencing homelessness and their families, and thereby to improve educational stability for these students. To this end, HSSP provides competitive grants to Washington community-based organizations that each work under memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with one or more school districts to help students and their families secure stable housing. In many cases, students and families are referred via school districts with whom they partner. With a student and/or their family’s consent, HSSP grantees may also enter relevant details into the Homeless Management Information System. This is part of Coordinated Entry, which connects families to the local Continuum of Care and a range of public agency- and community-provided services. Specific grant-funded strategies include, but are not limited to:

- housing navigation and case management, including assistance to family members in navigating the housing search process, as well as services such as language translation when needed and support in accessing federal and state programs for low-income households;
- direct short-term financial assistance to pay expenses that might otherwise stand in the way of a family securing stable housing, including assistance with “utilities, security and utility deposits, first and last month’s rent, rental application fees, [and] moving expenses”;³⁵ and
- diversion, in which alternative housing options are used to help families avoid entering shelters or other unstable sources of housing.

Through HSSP grants, nonprofit community organizations provide these more intensive housing support services to a subset of students experiencing homelessness and their families in any given partner district. By statute, the HSSP grant application review process must consider geographic diversity across the state, and greater weight is given to applications that demonstrate a commitment to addressing opportunity gaps among students experiencing homelessness.³⁶

When HSSP and HSSEP were established in 2016, HSSP funds were distributed via school districts (or consortia of districts), with each district-level grantee then passing the funds on to the nonprofit community housing partner organization they had designated in their grant application materials. This provision was subsequently modified to simplify the process. HSSP grants are now directly awarded to community nonprofits that provide housing supports, which then each partner with one or more school districts through MOUs. These MOUs are required to include details on how the partners will collaborate to address gaps and needs for students experiencing homelessness, as well as plans related to data sharing and data security.³⁷ Both HSSEP school district grantees and HSSP community organization grantees use the same definition of student homelessness—the McKinney-Vento definition—which ensures access to services that might otherwise have been limited had the less inclusive HUD definition been used instead. A housing provider may partner with a given district for HSSP services whether or not that district also receives HSSEP funds.

HSSEP Program Design

Administered by Washington's OSPI, HSSEP is a competitive grant program for Washington school districts. It is designed to promote educational stability for students experiencing homelessness by improving district capacity to identify students and provide them with appropriate supports. To this end, for example, grant funds may be used to subsidize the salary of a district homeless liaison and

HSSEP is designed to promote educational stability for students experiencing homelessness by improving district capacity to identify students and provide them with appropriate supports.

fund training for building-level points of contact. Grant funds may also be used to directly fund a range of student supports, including direct academic supports such as costs associated with transportation and with tutoring or other academic remediation. Since the revision of the legislation in 2023, the state has expanded allowable uses to more comprehensively address:

- supports to address basic student needs, such as clothing, food, and hygiene items;
- wraparound supports to “meet a student’s emergent needs and allow the student to fully participate in school,” including by school districts contracting with community-based providers to address needs related to housing, physical or behavioral health, and others;
- employment supports for both students and their family members; and
- enrichment activities, including out-of-school enrichment like tutoring provided in a shelter setting.³⁸

Through HSSEP grants, combined with other dedicated district funds for students experiencing homelessness, districts frequently make a range of services available to all eligible students. In some cases districts provide more intensive services, like case management or tutoring, to subsets of students experiencing homelessness who exhibit particular academic or behavioral risk factors. As with the HSSP grant, the HSSEP grant application review process must consider geographic diversity. Also paralleling its similarly named counterpart, the HSSEP grant is targeted at districts that demonstrate a commitment to partnering with local community-based organizations—including, but not limited to, housing partners—as

elaborated in the next section. However, districts are eligible to receive HSSEP grants whether or not they have an HSSP-funded community partner. Grant weighting is also oriented toward districts demonstrating a commitment to addressing systemic inequities and those serving unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness.³⁹

We discuss how coordination across the grant programs takes place at the state and local levels in the program implementation section of the report.

Understanding the Scale and Scope of State-Level Funding

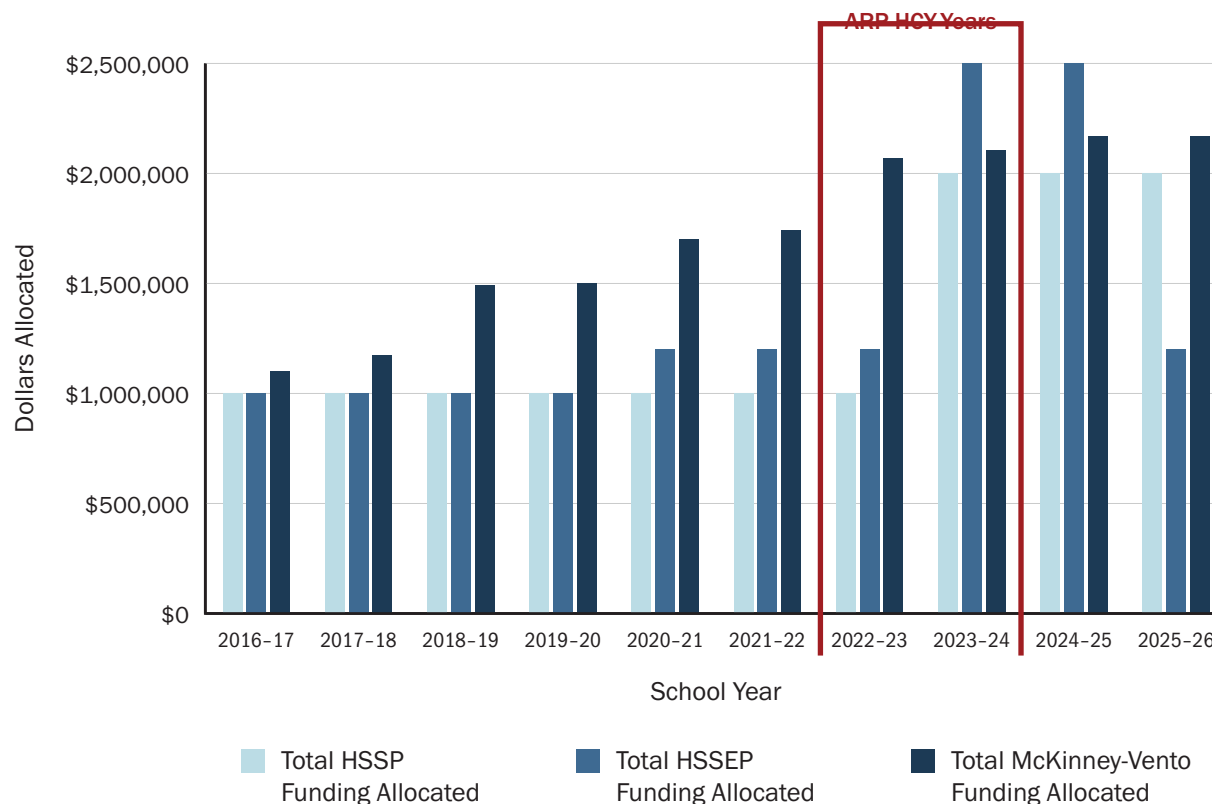
Statewide Appropriations for the Homeless Student Stability Programs

State funding for each of the two Homeless Student Stability programs is allocated separately to different agencies, and each program's funding comes from nonidentical sources. The Washington legislature provides funding for HSSP from both the state's General Fund and the state's Home Security Fund, a special fund within the state treasury that receives dollars from document recording fees, such as those for real estate transactions.⁴⁰ Funding for HSSP ranged from \$1 million to \$2 million per year between 2016–17 and 2025–26.⁴¹ To support HSSEP, the Washington legislature provides funding exclusively from the state's General Fund. Allocated funding ranged from \$1 million per year to \$2.5 million per year between 2016–17 and 2025–26.⁴²

Year-to-year trends in funding for both programs have been dictated primarily by changes in state revenue. [Figure 2](#) depicts those trends. As illustrated in the blue bars in [Figure 2](#), funds for both HSSP and HSSEP were relatively stable from 2016–17 to 2022–23, and funds for both programs roughly doubled in size for 2023–24 and 2024–25 in the setting of a state budget surplus. With state revenue having since tightened, 2025–26 funding for HSSEP reverted back to 2022–23 levels, while 2025–26 funding for HSSP remained at 2024–25 levels. For both programs, these funding totals include dollars granted to housing organizations (for HSSP) or school districts (for HSSEP) as well as funds used for state-level program administration.

(For comparison, [Figure 2](#) also depicts McKinney-Vento allocations for Washington in each year since the Homeless Student Stability programs began. Federal allocations to Washington state to support students experiencing homelessness, including McKinney-Vento, are discussed in more detail later in this report.)

Figure 2. Statewide HSSP and HSSEP Appropriations and Federal McKinney-Vento Appropriations to Washington State by Year, 2016–17 to 2025–26



Note: HSSP = Homeless Student Stability Program; HSSEP = Homeless Student Stability Education Program. The red bracketed region (2022–23 and 2023–24) indicates years in which one-time American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth funds—not displayed in this graph—were also available to school districts.

Sources: For HSSP and HSSEP allocations: Washington state budget acts from 2016 through 2025. For McKinney-Vento allocations: ED Data Express. [Homeless enrolled students by state: 2016–17 to 2022–23](#); ED Data Express. [Homeless enrolled students by state: 2023–24 and 2024–25](#); SchoolHouse Connection. [2025 EHCY funds released: Advocacy critical as 2026 budget battle begins](#).

HSSP Grantee Participation and Per-Grantee Funding

Between 2017 and 2025, the state allocated HSSP funds to 5–14 grantees per grant cycle; approximately 24 unique grantees have received funding in at least one of these grant cycles.⁴³ [Table 1](#) provides details about the number of HSSP grantees, the length of the grant cycle, and the size range of the grants in each legislative biennium.

**Table 1. Homeless Student Stability Program
Grant Details by Year, 2017–2025**

Legislative biennium	Total HSSP funding awarded to grantees	Number of HSSP grants awarded	Minimum HSSP grant award size	Median HSSP grant award size	Maximum HSSP grant award size
2017–19	\$1,750,000 (2-year grants)	9	\$50,000	\$120,000	\$540,000
2019–21	\$1,730,001 (18-month grants)	5	\$271,496	\$340,978	\$426,223
2021–23	\$1,700,000 (2 sets of 1-year grants, each totaling \$865,000)	5 per year	\$84,180 (1 year)	\$195,205 (1 year)	\$195,205 (1 year)
2023–25	\$3,566,400^a (2-year grants to five returning grantees and 18-month grants to nine new grantees)	14	\$84,574	\$200,000	\$433,355

^a In the 2023–25 legislative biennium, the 2-year grants awarded to five returning grantees totaled \$1,920,300, and the 18-month grants awarded to nine new grantees totaled \$1,646,100.

Note: HSSP = Homeless Student Stability Program.

Source: Personal communication with staff at Building Changes and the Washington Department of Commerce. (2026).

HSSEP Grantee Participation and Per-Grantee Funding

Between 2016–17 and 2024–25, OSPI allocated HSSEP grants to between 12 and 49 grantee districts per school year, with 83 unique districts receiving funding in at least one of these years. These 83 districts—representing 1 out of 4 districts statewide—enroll more than 60% of students in Washington and nearly three fourths (74%) of students experiencing homelessness statewide. HSSEP expanded the number of districts receiving funding to support students experiencing homelessness—funding that had previously only been available in the form of McKinney-Vento funds. Between 2016–17 and 2021–22—prior to the awarding of ARP-HCY funding following the COVID-19 pandemic—45 unique districts received HSSEP in at least 1 year, 33 (73%) of which had not received McKinney-Vento funding in any of the 3 years prior to their first HSSEP grant. [Table 2](#) provides details about the number of HSSEP grantees and the size range of the grants in each year, as well as the percentage of students experiencing homelessness statewide enrolled in grantee districts each year. Interviewees explained that the rationale for the larger number of grantees in the 2016–17 school year relative to the several years that followed was that the 2016–17 grants were considered smaller planning grants, with decisions subsequently made to restrict the number of district grantees so that the size of each grant could be considerably larger. As the table shows, the percentage of students in districts receiving HSSEP grants ranged from 16% to 54%, depending on the year and available funding.

**Table 2. Homeless Student Stability Education Program
Grant Details by Year, 2016–17 to 2024–25**

School year	Total HSSEP funding awarded to districts	Number of HSSEP grants awarded	Minimum HSSEP grant award size	Median HSSEP grant award size	Maximum HSSEP grant award size	Proportion of statewide SEH enrolled in grantee districts
2016–17	\$764,523	38	\$2,500	\$20,000	\$40,000	41%
2017–18	\$847,000	12	\$4,000	\$74,683	\$111,412	27%
2018–19	\$830,000	12	\$32,000	\$75,500	\$85,000	21%
2019–20	\$830,000	12	\$35,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	16%
2020–21	\$927,078	13	\$17,500	\$76,799	\$90,000	22%
2021–22	\$993,850	13	\$15,000	\$75,000	\$111,513	23%
2022–23	\$876,000	17	\$14,965	\$53,504	\$72,000	31%
2023–24	\$2,194,512	49	\$7,037	\$32,368	\$83,445	54%
2024–25	\$2,199,989	43	\$12,699	\$46,847	\$87,779	–

Notes: HSSEP = Homeless Student Stability Education Program; SEH = students experiencing homelessness. The increases in grantees in 2023–24 and 2024–25 are explained by large increases in the total amount allocated in the state budget for HSSEP in those years.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. [Proviso reports](#) (accessed 11/03/2025).

Contextualizing the Homeless Student Stability Programs Among Key Federal Funding Sources

In addition to the state’s HSSP and HSSEP programs, the federal government has provided Washington two key sets of grants, distributed by the state education agency to select school districts to support the identification of and provision of services for students experiencing homelessness. McKinney-Vento funding has been available annually both prior to and since HSSP and HSSEP began. The federal government also used COVID-19 funding to establish ARP-HCY subgrants as another key federal funding source to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. ARP-HCY funds were one-time subgrants awarded to school districts, announced in 2021 with funding rolled out in 2022–23 and 2023–24.

In the years since they were introduced, HSSEP funds have substantially augmented the federal funding previously available through McKinney-Vento to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. The infusion of additional funds from HSSEP has allowed some districts that were already receiving McKinney-Vento funds to build capacity to support students experiencing homelessness. HSSEP has also made targeted funding available for the first time to districts that did not receive McKinney-Vento grants.

HSSEP funds have substantially augmented the federal funding previously available through McKinney-Vento to identify and support students experiencing homelessness.

Federal McKinney-Vento funding allocated to Washington state has increased steadily and in a relatively linear fashion since 2016–17, from just over \$1.1 million in 2016–17 to around \$2.17 million in 2025–26.⁴⁴ To contextualize McKinney-Vento funding relative to funding levels for the Homeless Student Stability programs, refer back to [Figure 2](#), which arrays annual HSSP and HSSEP funding alongside annual McKinney-Vento funding levels in the years since HSSP and HSSEP began. As with the HSSP and HSSEP funding totals, the McKinney-Vento totals here include funds disbursed to district grantees as well as funds used for state-level program administration.

Whereas total McKinney-Vento funds available to Washington districts in any given year have ranged from roughly 1 to 2 times the quantity of HSSEP dollars available, the government awarded ARP-HCY funds only once, at an order of magnitude larger. Washington’s total ARP-HCY award amounted to approximately \$12.1 million. The federal government calculated each state’s total award size based on the state’s relative Title I, Part A payments and their identified enrollment of students experiencing homelessness.

This major infusion of funds to support students experiencing homelessness in Washington allowed a higher proportion of districts to receive ARP-HCY awards relative to HSSEP or McKinney-Vento. And particularly in the largest districts, ARP-HCY award sizes were considerably higher than the maximum HSSEP or McKinney-Vento awards. ARP-HCY funding was disbursed to 143 districts. This represents 43% of districts in the state, which collectively enrolled 88% of the state’s public school students and more than 90% of the state’s students identified as experiencing homelessness as of 2023–24. [Table 3](#) compares the number of grantees and award size ranges for ARP-HCY relative to McKinney-Vento and HSSEP. For McKinney-Vento and HSSEP, award size ranges are listed for 2023–24—the final year that ARP-HCY funds were available—to facilitate comparison to the ARP-HCY award size range.

**Table 3. ARP-HCY, McKinney-Vento, and HSSEP
District Grantee Counts and Award Sizes**

Grant	Number of WA district grantees since 2016–17	Minimum district award size	Median district award size	Maximum district award size
ARP-HCY	143 unique districts received one-time grants	\$6,800 total over 3 years	\$42,754 total over 3 years	\$667,000 total over 3 years
McKinney-Vento	19 to 38 per year; 66 unique districts received grants in at least one year	\$22,500 over 1 year (2023–24)	\$45,000 over 1 year (2023–24)	\$80,750 over 1 year (2023–24)
HSSEP	12 to 49 per year; 83 unique districts received grants in at least one year	\$7,037 over 1 year (2023–24)	\$32,368 over 1 year (2023–24)	\$83,445 over 1 year (2023–24)

Note: ARP-HCY = American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth; HSSEP = Homeless Student Stability Education Program.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. [Proviso reports](#). (accessed 11/03/2025).

How Washington's Homeless Student Stability Programs Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

In order to meet the varied needs of students and families experiencing homelessness, Washington's Homeless Student Stability programs provide for a range of services. This section of the report details program implementation, based on interviews with staff from a sample of districts that received Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP) funds over multiple years and community housing organizations that received Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) funds over multiple years.⁴⁵ (For a summary of research methods, see [Appendix A.](#)) We begin by describing the efforts of HSSEP-funded districts to improve identification of students experiencing homelessness and to provide a variety of supports and resources by blending and braiding HSSEP funds with funds from other sources. We then describe district partnerships with community organizations, including, but not limited to, HSSP-funded community organizations, and discuss the services provided through these partnerships. The section concludes by describing state-level administration and support to implement and connect the two programs.

District Efforts to Improve Identification

A crucial first step in supporting students experiencing homelessness in a given district is to accurately identify which students are eligible for services. As appears to be the case nationwide,⁴⁶ undercounting of students eligible for the services and protections afforded by the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act seems to have been a pervasive challenge in Washington districts prior to receipt of HSSEP funds. District staff in sample HSSEP grantee districts explained that HSSEP funds had been key in supporting more comprehensive identification of students experiencing homelessness. Indeed, as described in the next section, identification rates in repeat HSSEP grantee districts have risen far more rapidly in the years since the grant began than in districts that did not receive HSSEP funding.

Interviewees attributed these increases in identification to several practices. Student housing questionnaires during annual enrollment are standard in districts across the state, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has released a template that many of our interviewee districts adapted to fit local needs, though district- and building-level follow-up may vary depending on time and capacity. In districts that have received multiple HSSEP grants, dedicated funds allowed staff to spend more time following up directly with questionnaire nonrespondents and with families whose students might be eligible for services but for whom additional information was needed.

HSSEP funds—often combined with funding from other sources allocated to support students experiencing homelessness—have also supported detailed training for building-level points of contact and other school-level staff who can play an important role in identification. School counselors, as well as attendance clerks and other administrative staff, were especially well situated to identify students who were not experiencing homelessness when the academic year started but who had since transitioned into homelessness. As one interviewee explained, “It’s not that we have more kids [experiencing homelessness], necessarily. It’s just that we’ve done so much training and intensive work with school district staff that they understand what they’re looking for and are more likely to identify kids.”

In some districts, additional key methods for identifying students experiencing homelessness have included back-to-school and holiday events where staff distribute supplies and share resources with low-income families, as well as partnerships with local community organizations to identify and connect with students. A replicable best practice from one large district to augment identification was to have different district-level staff members each serve as the primary point of contact for different shelters and other community organizations that support families experiencing homelessness. This practice enabled the individual district staff members to build deeper relationships with shelter and community organization staff, ensuring that these staff had a clear district point of contact and facilitating warm handoffs.

District Services, Supports, and Resources via Blended and Braided Funds

In grantee districts, interviewees explained that HSSEP funds were an important piece of the puzzle in providing robust supports to students experiencing homelessness. In particular, these dollars often helped fund the district homeless liaison position and resource navigator positions at schools with high populations of students experiencing homelessness. To more fully address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, though, districts needed to combine funding from a range of sources that substantially exceeded what the HSSEP grant could fund on its own. Common additional sources of funding in interviewee districts included McKinney-Vento pass-through grants, targeted use of Title I funds, and grants or in-kind services from local community partners. District homeless liaisons also closely engaged with other district programs or offices, such as Family and Community Resource Centers, that provided complementary services to broader subsets of students but were frequently used to support students experiencing homelessness and their families.

This blending and braiding of HSSEP funds with those from other sources positioned grantee districts to provide students experiencing homelessness and their families with a variety of services, supports, and resources. These commonly included logistical supports like transportation for students to their school of origin; subsidies to participate in school activities; connections and referrals for students and families to external housing partners and other community organizations; and physical resources like clothes, shoes, hygiene items, and snacks or gift cards collected and distributed through the district office or at school sites.

This blending and braiding of HSSEP funds with those from other sources positioned grantee districts to provide students experiencing homelessness and their families with a variety of services, supports, and resources.

For transportation—which can be logistically complicated as well as financially costly—several sample districts employed creative solutions, often alongside partner organizations. One district described a partnership with its regional Education Service District to coordinate cross-district transportation for students experiencing homelessness; another described partnering with its local Boys and Girls Club, which serves as a transportation hub for students experiencing homelessness in the district, to

simplify logistics. In a third district, large in terms of both geography and enrollment, administrators allocated transportation-earmarked dollars to help fund a position specifically charged with overseeing transportation for students experiencing homelessness.

For unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness, those identified as most academically or behaviorally at risk, or students otherwise having higher needs, districts frequently provided some combination of more intensive interventions. (See [Using the Check and Connect Strategy to Address the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness](#).) These included academic supports, such as tutoring or academic coaching, career planning, facilitation of credit retrieval opportunities, and postgraduation planning and support with the transition to college or career. Dedicated counseling and case management were also frequently available to high-need subsets of students experiencing homelessness, especially at the secondary school level. Some districts provided this counseling or case management directly through district or school staff, while others partnered with resource navigators employed by local community organizations.

Using the Check and Connect Strategy to Address the Needs of Students Experiencing Homelessness

One district required students experiencing homelessness who needed the most support to participate in regular check-ins with a designated staff member. Check-ins helped monitor progress and ensure attention to individual needs. The strategy was grounded in the evidence-based “Check and Connect” approach, but flexibly adapted to meet the specific needs of students experiencing homelessness.

The district used a multitiered system of supports to identify students who required most support (Tier 3)—around 5%–10% of students experiencing homelessness in each school. The district invested its HSSEP funds in community specialists connected to the office of the district homeless liaison. Students then met weekly with these specialists, who:

- discussed students’ attendance and academic work and helped them navigate behavioral or relationship challenges;
- helped students understand their grades, prioritize overlapping homework assignments, and navigate school processes; and
- ensured that students had access to resources meeting their needs, such as hygiene supplies, snacks, and school materials.

Each specialist worked with 10 to 15 Tier 3–identified students each week, among their other duties. District representatives credited this strategy with contributing to decreases in truancy, greater retention in school, and higher graduation rates for students receiving this intervention.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute interview with HSSEP grantee district representative (2025, April 11). See also Maynard, B. R., Kjellstrand, E. K., & Thompson, A. M. (2014). [Effects of Check and Connect on attendance, behavior, and academics: A randomized effectiveness trial](#). *Research on Social Work Practice*, 24(3), 296–309; University of Minnesota. [Check and Connect](#) (accessed 10/04/2025); What Works Clearinghouse. (2015). [WWIC intervention report: Check and Connect](#). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Braided funds also supported the many other responsibilities of district homeless liaisons. For example, liaisons often developed and delivered toolkits and training for building-level points of contact and other school staff supporting students experiencing homelessness. Some, especially in larger districts, regularly spent substantial time coordinating with other departments in the district, such as transportation and special education. Liaisons also took on grant writing and fundraising responsibilities along with managing the disbursement of external donations for expenses district funds could not cover. They were also responsible for managing community partnerships, discussed next.

Partnerships With Community Organizations

Interviewees at the state and district levels consistently emphasized the importance of community partnerships in helping districts more holistically support students experiencing homelessness and their families. These district–community partnerships—including, but not limited to, partnerships with HSSP grantee organizations—enabled district staff to connect students and their families with services beyond those that the school district itself was positioned to provide. District representatives described an extensive range of community partnerships with organizations that provided direct services and resource navigation, including food banks, community health organizations, legal aid groups, free or low-cost translation services, local and state social services, organizations providing student and family case management, and organizations providing housing support. Local faith-based organizations, as well as community-based organizations like the YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Elks, Rotary, and United Way, were common district partners and, in some cases, supported district logistics—like transportation for students experiencing homelessness—in addition to providing outside services.

Interviewees described partner organizations as instrumental in helping students and families address broader needs like housing stability and navigating discrete circumstances that threatened students' educational access and success. These included costs or resources that might fall outside the uses typically allowed through district funds. For example, as a homeless liaison in one district illustrated:

Sometimes, a parent can't go to work because their tires are bald and they don't have [replacement] tires. Well, our [district] funds aren't going to let us use money for that. ... But if a parent can't go to work and they can't, sometimes, [get their child] to school—there's unique things like that, where I [can] reach out to a community group [and ask], "Are you able to 'adopt' this family and help them with their tires?" So we do presentations and have partnerships because we have groups like that who we can contact and say, "Hey, we have this situation." ... Another family needed bunk beds because they took in a student, and so our YMCA navigator was able to go through some different agencies and get bunk beds.

Interviewees explained that community partnerships had become both increasingly frequent and increasingly robust over time and asserted that district homeless liaisons had an especially important role to play in cultivating and maintaining these partnerships.

Family and Community Resource Centers

In several sample districts, family and community resource centers also played an outsize role both in providing resources and in connecting students and families with partner organizations. (For details, see [Additional Support Through Family and Community Resource Centers](#).) Family and Community Resource

Centers are not present in every district and are not exclusively designed to serve students and families experiencing homelessness, but where they exist, they serve as natural hubs where students and families experiencing homelessness can learn about and get connected to resources addressing a wide range of needs.

Additional Support Through Family and Community Resource Centers

In several of the districts that received multiple Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP) grants, staff interviewed for this study described school district Family and Community Resource Centers (FCRCs) as playing a valuable supportive role in stability for students experiencing homelessness, as well as in preventing homelessness. Funded through a combination of district funds from sources like Title I, community and philanthropic dollars, and in-kind time and resources donated by community organizations, FCRCs were typically staffed by dedicated family engagement coordinators whose role is to connect with families and provide resources and information to meet their needs. Depending on district size, some FCRCs operated from a single building or room, while others operated multiple centers at schools throughout the district.

FCRCs typically served as a district hub for providing some combination of direct resources and services and for partnerships with community organizations that could provide broader supports. Resources commonly provided in FCRCs included essentials such as toiletries and hygiene supplies, school supplies, and access to showers and laundry services. Several FCRCs also stocked food pantries, with one offering a weekend backpack program through which students could take home backpacks of food, as well as a clothing closet for students and families.

One district staff member shared that providing coats, shoes, and other warm clothing to students in need had been important in maintaining school attendance during the winter months. In terms of partnerships with community organizations, FCRCs—often in conjunction with district liaisons—frequently offered parenting information and resources, helped students and families access information and connect to organizations to support employment and housing searches, and helped students and families access low-cost health care and health insurance. In fact, one district was planning to open a school-based health center in conjunction with its FCRC. In another district, FCRC coordinators also served as homelessness building-level points of contact, strengthening the connection with the district’s homeless liaison office.

Given that strong community connections to support students experiencing homelessness is one of the criteria considered in the HSSEP grant review process, FCRCs can both bolster a district’s application and position that district to effectively leverage HSSEP funds.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute interviews with HSSEP grantee district representatives. (2025). For additional information about Family and Community Resource Centers—known in some districts as Family Resource Centers—see Langley, K., Moreno, J., Roller White, C., Schurr, K., & Kurtz, G. (2021). [Washington State Family Resource Center landscape study: Summary of findings](#). Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

District Collaboration With HSSP Grantees

The housing-focused community partner organizations receiving HSSP funds provided more intensive services, working closely with small cohorts of students and families to help secure stable housing. HSSP grantees either worked with small subsets of families who had one or more students enrolled in partnering school districts or worked directly with unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness in partner districts. HSSP-supported caseloads varied by organization but could be as small as 15 to 20 families or unaccompanied students receiving the most intensive services at any given time. Especially common HSSP-funded supports included assistance with housing searches, navigating housing supports and services, and case management, as well as direct short-term financial assistance to pay housing-related expenses on behalf of families or unaccompanied students. For example, HSSP-funded organizations frequently assisted families in resolving debts that would otherwise preclude their eligibility for stable housing (e.g., rental arrears, backlogged utility payments) and with expenses involved in procuring that housing (e.g., security deposits, first and last month's rent, moving expenses).

Representatives from HSSP-funded organizations explained that close district partnerships were crucial to their work, both in terms of referring students or families for services and in filling in some of the information gaps that affect student and family outcomes. As one representative explained, “I think our relationship with the McKinney-Vento liaisons is critical for a lot of the students. It’s very helpful to have a more comprehensive picture ... and a lot of times the McKinney-Vento liaisons will know the family history a little bit; they’ll have had more regular contact.”

Representatives from HSSP-funded organizations explained that close district partnerships were crucial to their work.

Some HSSP-funded community organizations also blended HSSP dollars with other sources of funding to provide more comprehensive wraparound services for students and families. For example, an organization working exclusively with unaccompanied youth described conducting a comprehensive needs assessment for each newly participating student, followed by case management that attended to a suite of services tailored to that student’s needs. In addition to housing support, case management included “all these smaller services that come together to create more stability. So everything from [helping students obtain] an ID and documents to food support to planning for the future—[resources] that really go hand in hand with housing needs.”

“Warm Handoffs” With Community Partner Organizations

Nearly all interviewees described the importance of “warm handoffs” by staff at schools or districts to staff at community partner organizations in helping students experiencing homelessness and their families access needed supports. Warm handoffs are more than just referrals to resources. Enabled through close district–community partnerships, these increase the likelihood that students and families referred to an agency or organization will be able to efficiently access those services. A district staff member spoke to the power of maintaining these relationships with community partners, explaining, “We do a really good job of keeping up to date on what resources are available. We have a lot of back doors into agencies.”

Warm handoffs can also minimize the number of times students and families need to repeatedly share their situations—which may be traumatic or associated with shame and which may discourage families from seeking services. Homeless liaisons from several districts spoke specifically about strategies they are employing to help students experiencing homelessness and their families feel comfortable enough to approach organizations and obtain the appropriate supports. Replicable district practices included making deliberate efforts to hire personnel who themselves have lived experience with homelessness and other shared characteristics (e.g., common linguistic backgrounds); training building-level points of contact to be effective resource navigators, including training on trauma-informed and culturally relevant practices as well as on the available resources and community relationships; and, more broadly, working to ensure students and families did not feel they were in trouble or were being judged for their unstable housing situation.

State-Level Administration and Support

In addition to the supports and services provided by school districts and community-based organizations, cross-agency relationship building and collaboration were also central to the functioning of the HSSP and HSSEP programs. The fact that HSSP is administered by the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) at the Department of Commerce, while HSSEP is administered by OSPI, empowered each agency to draw on its particular areas of expertise. At the same time, the interconnected nature of these programs—also a key design feature to address the challenge of student homelessness from multiple angles—has required substantial communication and collaboration, both at the outset and on an ongoing basis. As one interviewee illustrated:

The whole point of this is to [facilitate] partnerships [among] folks that are not historically funded or structured to work together. And so a critical piece of this is ... if you can make sure that the folks who are not already working together start working together.

Developing a Shared Understanding Across Agencies

Leaders and staff at each agency worked—and continue to work—to develop a shared understanding of the other agency’s relevant practices, systems, and constraints. These relationships and shared understandings deepened over time, informed by gaps that agency staff and grantees encountered and worked to address. For example, one interviewee explained that personnel working from the education side entered the partnership with a limited understanding of the state homeless response system, which constrained the support that education personnel could provide to districts working to connect families with appropriate services. As state education agency personnel learned more about this system, they were able to communicate that knowledge to district staff. To leverage shared understanding and continue to build on it, staff at each agency now also review and score applications for the other agency’s program (i.e., OSPI staff review HSSP grant applications from housing-focused community-based organizations and OHY staff review HSSEP grant applications from districts). As one state-level program administrator assessed:

The work is still siloed in the sense that the K–12 system has [its own] role and funding streams, and the housing system has its own role and its own funding streams. ... But there has been great collaboration and, I think, more and more integration.

Supporting Cross-Agency Learning

Additional state-level support from the Washington-based nonprofit organization Building Changes helped OHY and OSPI create a bridge at the ground level between housing partners and school districts. Building Changes staff worked alongside OHY and OSPI personnel to create regular opportunities for shared learning and collaboration, some specific to HSSP and HSSEP grantees and others open to a broader subset of school districts and community organizations. For example, the School/Housing Network brings together a broad range of school districts, housing partners, and community organizations for free trainings and discussions on issues ranging from housing matters, such as tenants' rights, to education-related issues, such as supporting the needs of students with disabilities who are also experiencing homelessness.

A Building Changes–facilitated community of practice provided additional opportunities for HSSP and HSSEP grantees to engage with and learn from each other. The community of practice structure includes both online and region-specific in-person meetings, helping grantee districts and nonprofit organizations to hear directly from the state agencies, learn from examples of collaboration and positive practices, understand mutual needs, jointly problem-solve, and form relationships that might undergird new partnerships. Topics have included best practices in supporting unaccompanied high school youth in transitions to college and career, local interventions to prevent homelessness, a “myth-busters” activity to help community organizations and school districts better understand grant requirements and partnership logistics, resources for conducting needs assessments for students experiencing homelessness, and ample time for individual districts and community organizations to network and strategize.

As the technical assistance provider for HSSP, Building Changes also leads HSSP-specific learning circles for grantee organization personnel. Sessions have addressed issues such as rights and obligations under federal legislation, insurance matters, and how to access additional grant funds. These are further supported with office hours to provide direct support to grantee housing organizations.

Building Capacity at the State Level

At the individual agency level, both OHY and OSPI have built substantial capacity to support students experiencing homelessness since the Homeless Student Stability programs' introduction in 2016. Interviewees explained how this capacity building has more broadly strengthened statewide attention to and support for the challenges students experiencing homelessness face, including, but not limited to, support for HSSP and HSSEP grantees. OHY has grown substantially since its establishment, developing a suite of programs. These include strategic initiatives centered on a homelessness prevention continuum, implemented through multi-agency working groups and supported with resources and grant programs for topics like crisis response and housing support for young adults. OHY's strategy is aimed at identifying the root causes of youth homelessness, preventing homelessness where possible, and intervening early so that incidences of homelessness are “rare, brief, and non-recurring.”⁴⁷

Similarly, over the years since the Homeless Student Stability programs were authorized, OSPI has made additional investments in staffing to build capacity and serve a wider range of districts. OSPI, which—prior to the establishment of HSSEP—had only one staff member whose primary focus was supporting students experiencing homelessness, has since had as many as six staff members simultaneously working in this capacity. These staff have worked across a range of programs, including McKinney-Vento and

HSSEP, as well as supporting districts that received neither grant. This additional investment included a dedicated trainer who provides webinars and live training to all district homeless liaisons statewide, an additional staff member who is responsible for technical assistance and dispute resolution, and another who oversees grant management and administration. This combined support helped ensure all district liaisons understood their role and the rights and protections afforded under McKinney-Vento, and that liaisons were aware of how federal and state funds could be used to support students experiencing homelessness.

Key personnel inside and outside of OSPI posited that this state-level infrastructure created a “rising tide lifts all boats” effect that helped explain some of the statewide trends in outcomes for all students experiencing homelessness, including improved identification and graduation rates. (These trends are detailed in the next section of this report.) As one interviewee explained:

Because we’re creating artifacts, and ... now where we have communities of practice where anybody can join in, I think it’s allowing us to leverage the funds [to have] a much broader impact than [on] just the districts that are receiving HSSEP dollars.

Several interviewees also credited this strong state-level infrastructure with effective disbursement and spend-down of American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating more robust support for students experiencing homelessness. As one commented:

OSPI knew how to do this. You had a ton of districts who knew how to do it. We knew how we were going to get that money out because we had really well-honed grant systems for that. We knew exactly what programs to invest in. We had somebody, Building Changes, who could help districts actually implement it.

Indeed, according to publicly available federal data published in January 2025, Washington had spent down more than 97% of its \$12.1 million ARP-HCY allocation. This spend-down represents a higher proportion of allocated funds than all but two other states and is far higher than the national average of 79% spend-down as of January 2025.⁴⁸ Given the greater flexibility of ARP-HCY funds relative to what has been typically allowed under McKinney-Vento funds, including on a range of housing-related supports,⁴⁹ the high spend-down of these funds to support students experiencing homelessness in the post-pandemic period is especially encouraging.

Student Outcomes and the Role of State-Level Funding

As detailed in the previous sections of this report, Washington's Homeless Student Stability programs are intended to complement funding from the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in service of improving the stability of students experiencing homelessness and their families. Across Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP) grantee districts, interviewees consistently described improved district processes to identify students experiencing homelessness and explained how their districts have worked with community organizations—including, but not limited to, Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) grantees—to address some of the broader needs of these students and their families. Grantee districts also consistently reported providing more intensive services through strategies such as case management, although resource constraints have generally limited these more intensive services to relatively small subsets of students experiencing homelessness.

Our research team sought to understand the extent to which these collective efforts were reflected in educational outcomes. As a preview, findings from our quantitative analyses, together with interviews with district homeless liaisons, suggest that since the inception of the HSSEP and HSSP programs, Washington has seen improvements in some outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. Notably, state data show an increase in the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness—which has been most pronounced in grantee districts—and reveal statewide improvements in overall high school graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness. We also find that students in districts that received HSSEP and McKinney-Vento funding were significantly less likely to move schools during the school year than matched-comparison students in districts that did not receive funding.⁵⁰ Additionally, data published by the Washington-based nonprofit technical assistance provider Building Changes show that the majority of families receiving services from HSSP grantees increased their residential stability.

We begin this section by looking at the outcomes we might expect to change most quickly, based on how district liaisons described using their funds to support students experiencing homelessness in their jurisdictions. In particular, HSSEP funding is primarily designed and used to improve identification and support students' educational stability; HSSP funding is also stability focused. Accordingly, we first looked at how the number of students identified as experiencing homelessness changed over time and then at changes in school mobility—an important initial metric for stability. Next, we examined outcomes that might take more time, effort, or financial investment to change. These included (1) attendance rates, as improved stability may create greater opportunities to more regularly attend school; (2) exclusionary discipline rates, which are one indicator of how school culture and climate might change for students experiencing homelessness as they are better supported; and (3) longer-term learning outcomes as measured by cohort high school graduation rates.

In each case, we used publicly available data sources. For mobility and attendance measures, we supplemented public data with an administrative dataset received from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These data enabled us to use a more rigorous matched-comparison approach for certain analyses, through which we examined changes in outcomes for students experiencing homelessness within and outside of grantee districts to more directly assess whether funding contributed to changes in these metrics.

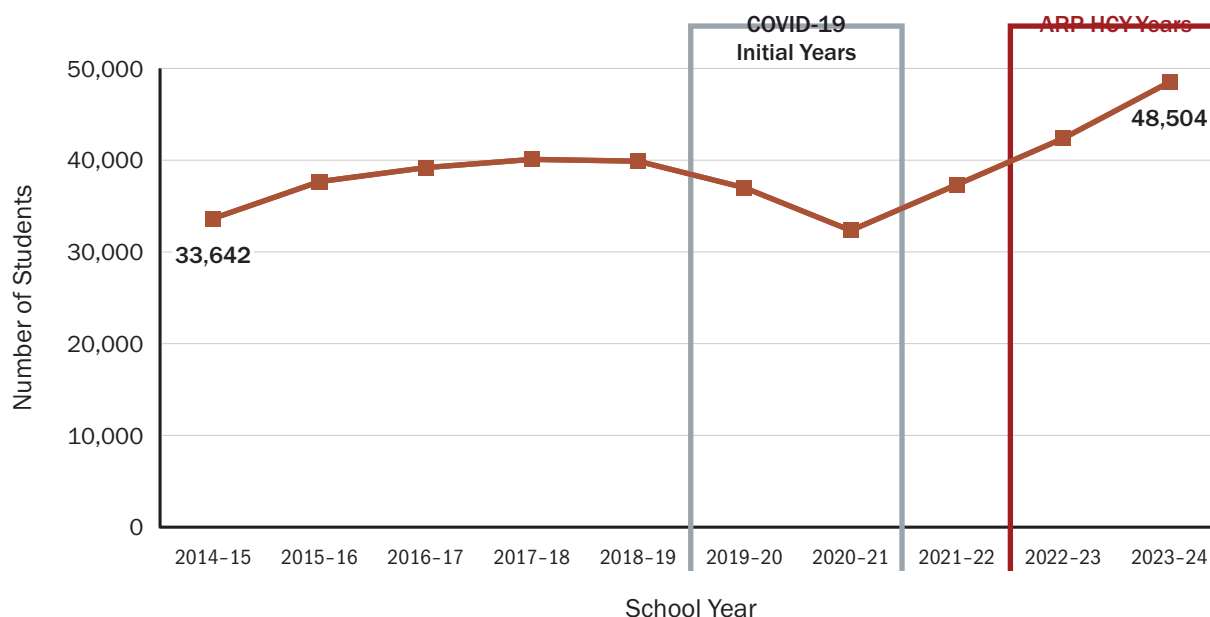
Identification

Statewide data showed that the number of Washington students identified as experiencing homelessness has increased over time, as shown in [Figure 3](#). Although some of this increase may be attributable to worsening economic conditions—discussed in more detail below—interviews with district- and state-level personnel strongly suggest that at least part of this increase is attributable to improvements in identification processes and procedures.

Identification is the first and most proximal outcome that might be expected from additional funding. This is a crucial step, given that students experiencing homelessness cannot receive supports or referrals to services unless they are identified. And yet, student homelessness is widely understood to be significantly underidentified nationwide.⁵¹ Ensuring students are receiving the appropriate services therefore requires school- and district-level systems that help staff recognize signs that a student may be experiencing homelessness, discreetly talk with the family, and determine McKinney-Vento eligibility. Funding that builds district capacity can help improve identification.

Statewide data showed that the number and proportion of students identified as experiencing homelessness increased over time, rising from 3.0% (33,642 students) of total enrollment statewide in 2014–15 to 4.2% (48,504 students) in 2023–24. (See [Figure 3](#).) This represents an increase of more than 40% over that period and around 24% since the introduction of HSSEP in 2016–17, while total student enrollment itself grew by only around 1%.

Figure 3. Number of Washington Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness, 2014–15 to 2023–24



Notes: The gray bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during portions of which many schools were closed to in-person instruction. The red bracketed region (2022–23 and 2023–24) indicates the years during which American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth funds were available to school districts.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2024). [Data on students experiencing homelessness: Report to the legislature](#).

Of course, an increase in the number and proportion of students who are identified as experiencing homelessness can also be an indication of worsening economic circumstances and an increase in poverty and associated housing insecurity, and there is some evidence to suggest this is a contributing factor. For example, the proportion of students identified as coming from low-income backgrounds increased by around 5% over the same period,⁵² although this is a much smaller percentage increase than the 40% increase noted above for students identified as experiencing homelessness. Liaisons in sample districts also commented on increasing rents and a lack of affordable housing in their communities as having contributed to worsening homelessness.

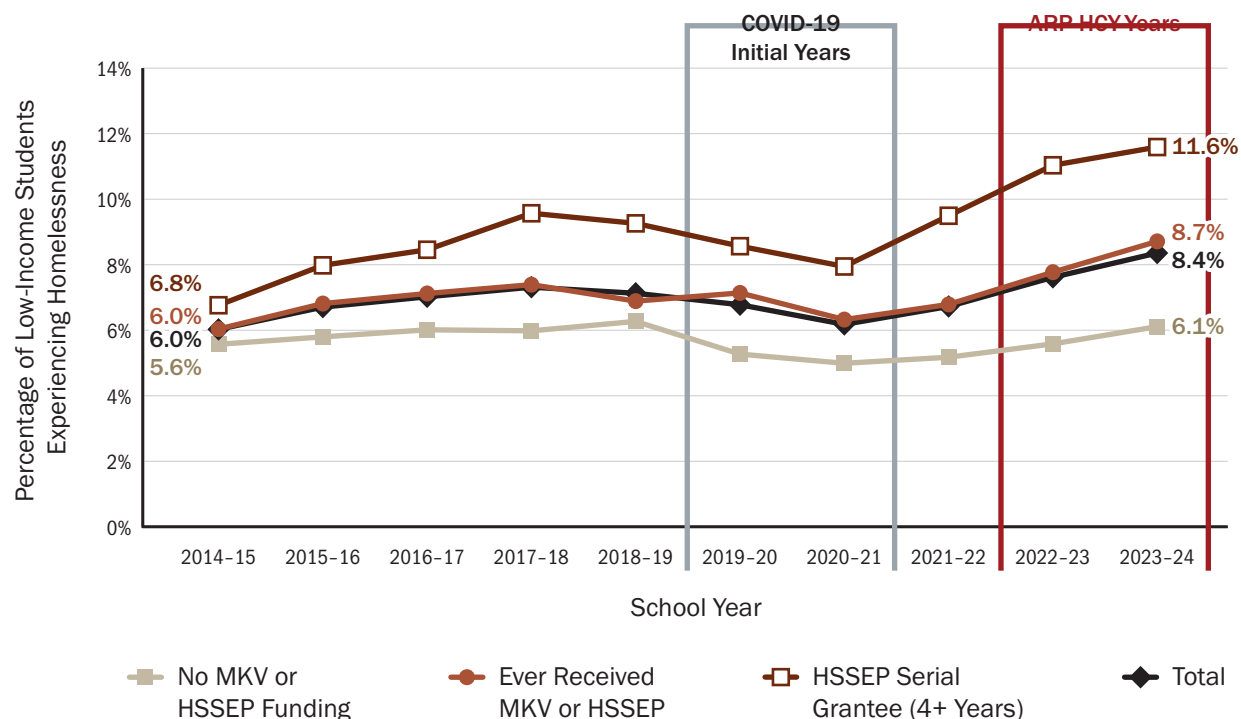
However, improved identification strategies among districts also appear to explain part of the increase. First, the rate of increase in students identified as experiencing homelessness greatly exceeds that of the increase in students from low-income families, as noted above. Second, among the general population, the proportion of continuing and new homeless and unstably housed individuals as measured in Washington State Department of Commerce annual snapshot reports has increased by only around 3% pre- to post-pandemic.⁵³ (Note that annual Commerce snapshot reports use a different identification and count methodology than that of school districts.)

Third, liaisons in sample districts described increased rates of identification as primarily due to more effective district systems for identification, the Washington-specific requirement (since 2019) that each school have a designated point of contact in addition to the district liaison mandated by McKinney-Vento, and increased training for those building-level staff. As one liaison noted, “With the addition of HSSEP funds, our intake process has [improved] because we have more staff able to answer phone calls and to reach out and to be in school buildings.” Liaisons also credited resources like Family and Community Resource Centers for opening up lines of communication for families experiencing homelessness and supporting identification.

Further, evidence suggests that district funding to support students experiencing homelessness played a role in improved identification. We looked at the proportion of students from low-income backgrounds who were identified as experiencing homelessness—a commonly used metric to understand how effectively districts identify homelessness.⁵⁴ Statewide, we found that this proportion increased more rapidly in districts that received either or both McKinney-Vento and HSSEP funds, and increased even more rapidly in districts that regularly received HSSEP funds (i.e., in 4 or more of the first 9 years of the program), relative to districts receiving neither (see [Figure 4](#)). In addition, the number of districts identifying 10% or more of low-income students as experiencing homelessness—an often-cited benchmark in the literature⁵⁵—increased from 67 to 83 districts from 2015–16 to 2023–24.⁵⁶ Around 51% of districts receiving McKinney-Vento and/or HSSEP funds identified at least 10% of students from low-income families as experiencing homelessness in 2023–24, compared to just under 20% of districts not receiving funding.

Notably, the largest increases statewide in identification of students experiencing homelessness occurred in the post-pandemic years (see [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#)), when a far larger proportion of Washington districts received homelessness-specific funding in the form of American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) grants, boosting district capacity statewide. Further, nearly all of the districts receiving McKinney-Vento and/or HSSEP grants also received ARP-HCY grants. These data further suggest that increased funding can support districts in improving identification. However, as districts receiving grant funding tend to be larger and more urban with differing characteristics and student demographics, additional factors may also contribute to increases, and we thus do not assert a causal relationship.

Figure 4. Percentage of Low-Income Washington Students Identified as Experiencing Homelessness, by District Grantee Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24



Notes: MKV = McKinney-Vento; HSSEP = Homeless Student Stability Education Program. The gray bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during portions of which many schools were closed to in-person instruction. The red bracketed region (2022–23 and 2023–24) indicates the years during which American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth funds were available to school districts.

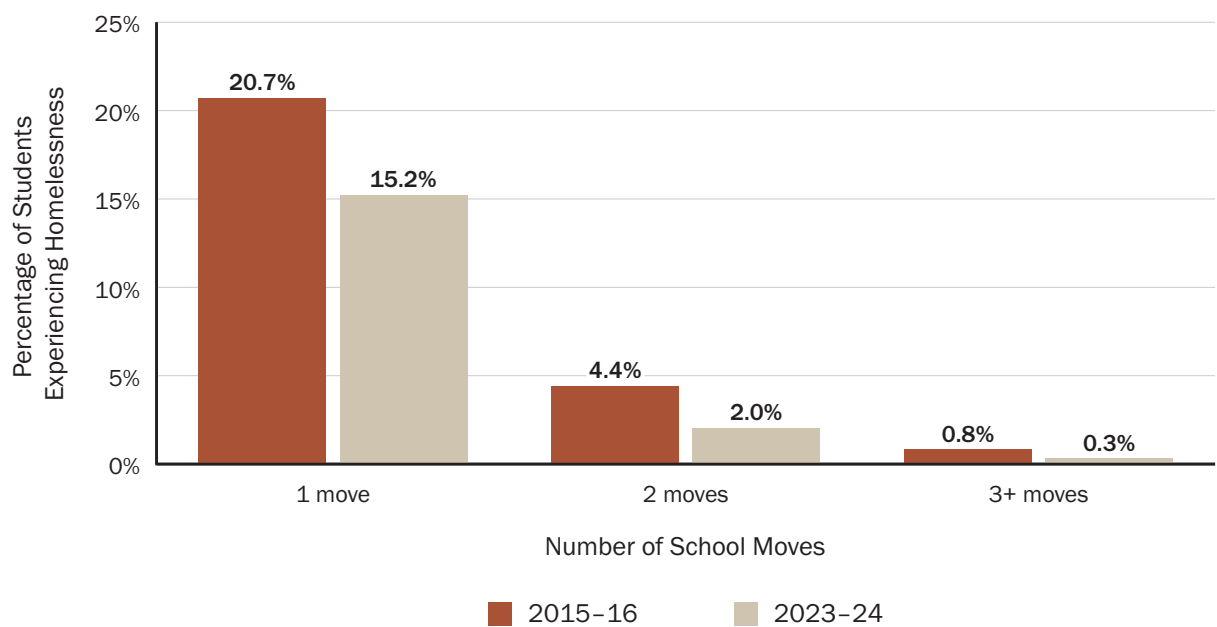
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).

School Stability

A primary objective of the HSSEP and HSSP programs is to provide increased stability for students experiencing homelessness. Changes in a student's living arrangement frequently result in a change of the school where that student is enrolled, and school moves can be highly disruptive to students' educational progression—separating students from supportive adult and peer relationships, disrupting routines and instructional pacing, and exacerbating the risk of absences and dropping out of school.⁵⁷ Previous research finds that student mobility can affect test scores and likelihood of graduation, with students experiencing homelessness at elevated risk of negative academic outcomes.⁵⁸ Once a student is identified as experiencing homelessness, informed of their right to remain in their school of origin, and connected with transportation and other supportive services, they may be less likely to change schools. This further underscores the importance of targeted funding for these services. Analysis of an administrative dataset provided by OSPI, shown in Figure 5, yields information about how student mobility has changed since the introduction of the Homeless Student Stability programs by counting the number of times a student had changed their school of primary enrollment during the school year.

This analysis found that prior to the introduction of the HSSEP and HSSP programs (2015–16), the proportion of students experiencing homelessness who changed schools at least once during the school year was nearly 26%—more than 5 times larger than the 5% of their stably housed peers. Among students experiencing homelessness, around 5% of students changed schools two or more times; for their stably housed peers, this was just 0.4%. However, the data showed significant improvements in stability by 2023–24 for students experiencing homelessness, with less than 18% changing schools during that year and reducing the disparity in school moves to around 4 times that of their peers. Moreover, the number of students experiencing homelessness who changed schools two or more times during the school year had been cut in half, to less than 2.5%.⁵⁹

Figure 5. Percentage of Washington Students Experiencing Homelessness Who Changed Schools During the School Year, 2015–16 and 2023–24



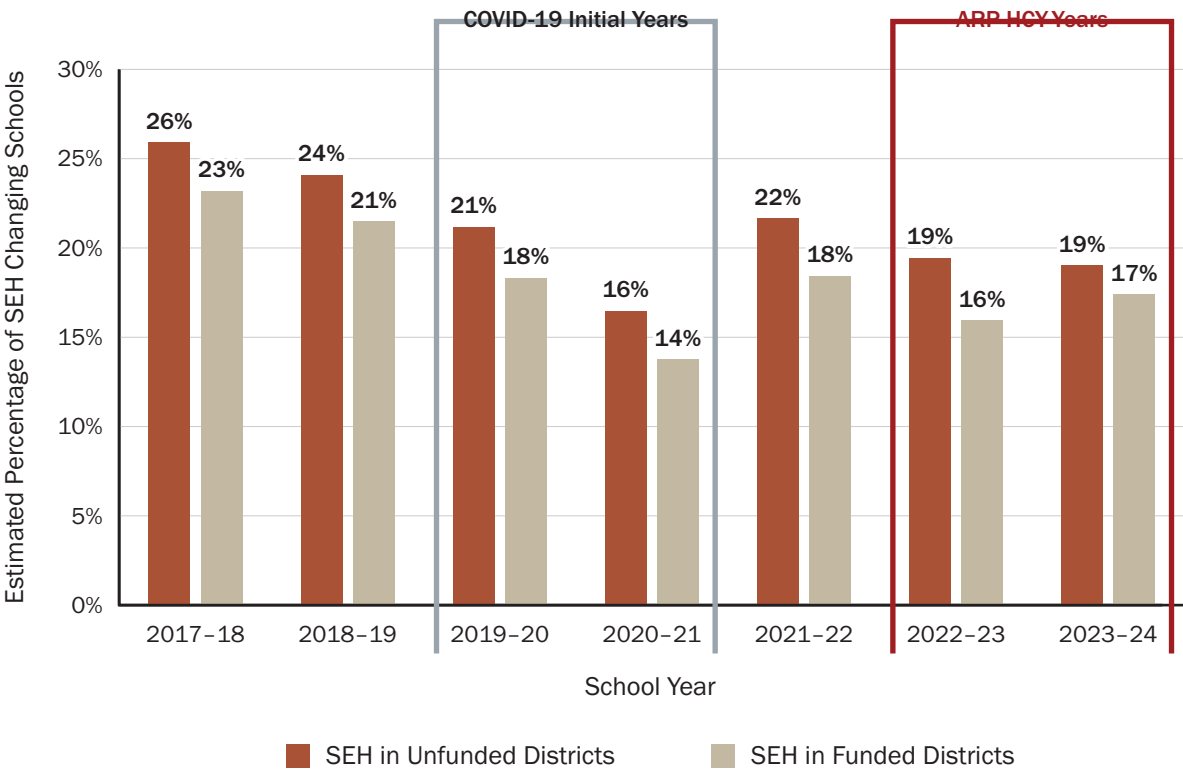
Note: A school move is defined as a change in a student’s school of primary enrollment occurring during the school year.
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).

It is difficult to know whether and to what extent these positive trends in school mobility are attributable to the additional funding to support students experiencing homelessness that became available for districts in 2016–17. For example, given that the number of students experiencing homelessness has also increased since 2016–17, it is possible that more recently identified students have different patterns of school mobility. Other statewide or district policy or funding changes occurring at the same time could also have affected this mobility.

Given the centrality of student stability to the Homeless Student Stability programs, we strengthened our analyses by creating a matched sample of students experiencing homelessness in districts that did and did not receive HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funding. This allowed us to specifically look at associations between district receipt of funding and student mobility. (See [Appendix A](#) for regression

output and additional methodological details.) Using the matched-comparison sample, we found that receipt of funding was statistically significantly associated with a decreased likelihood of changing schools for students experiencing homelessness. Figure 6 shows the estimated rate of changing schools between students experiencing homelessness in funded (McKinney-Vento and/or HSSEP) and unfunded districts, after adjusting for differences in student and district characteristics. For example, in the 2017–18 school year, district receipt of funding was associated with a lower likelihood of moving schools (23.2%) compared to a similar student in a district that did not receive grant funding (25.9%). Findings were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level in all years except 2023–24.

Figure 6. Estimated Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness Changing Schools During the School Year in Funded vs. Unfunded Districts, 2017–18 to 2023–24



Notes: SEH = students experiencing homelessness. Findings are based on a logistic regression on a matched-comparison sample of students experiencing homelessness in districts receiving McKinney-Vento and/or Homeless Student Stability Education Program funding vs. similar students in unfunded districts. Models accounted for student and district characteristics. A school move is defined as a change in a student’s school of primary enrollment occurring during the school year. The gray bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during portions of which many schools were closed to in-person instruction. The red bracketed region (2022–23 and 2023–24) indicates the years during which American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth funds were available to school districts. Findings are from 2017–18, as HSSEP funding began in 2016–17 and analyses account for prior-year variables. All differences displayed were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, except 2023–24.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).

Although these findings account for a range of student and district characteristics, including students' prior mobility, they cannot account for all confounding factors. We therefore describe these findings as associational rather than causal. Nonetheless, these findings provide strong indication that district receipt of the HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento grants is a contributing factor in improved educational stability for students experiencing homelessness, a core intent of state policy. Grant-funded district activities included efforts to improve transportation logistics for students experiencing homelessness and inform newly identified students of their right to transportation to their school of origin, which may have helped contribute to reduced school mobility among students experiencing homelessness in grantee districts.

In addition to the greater school stability evidenced among students, the HSSP program simultaneously provided greater residential stability for many families. According to recent data published by Building Changes, HSSP housing programs served 1,049 families between 2022 and 2025, and 925 families had subsequently exited these programs. Among these, nearly 60% had moved into permanent housing, and another 5% had improved their housing situation (e.g., from unsheltered to a hotel or motel), despite not having exited to permanent housing.⁶⁰

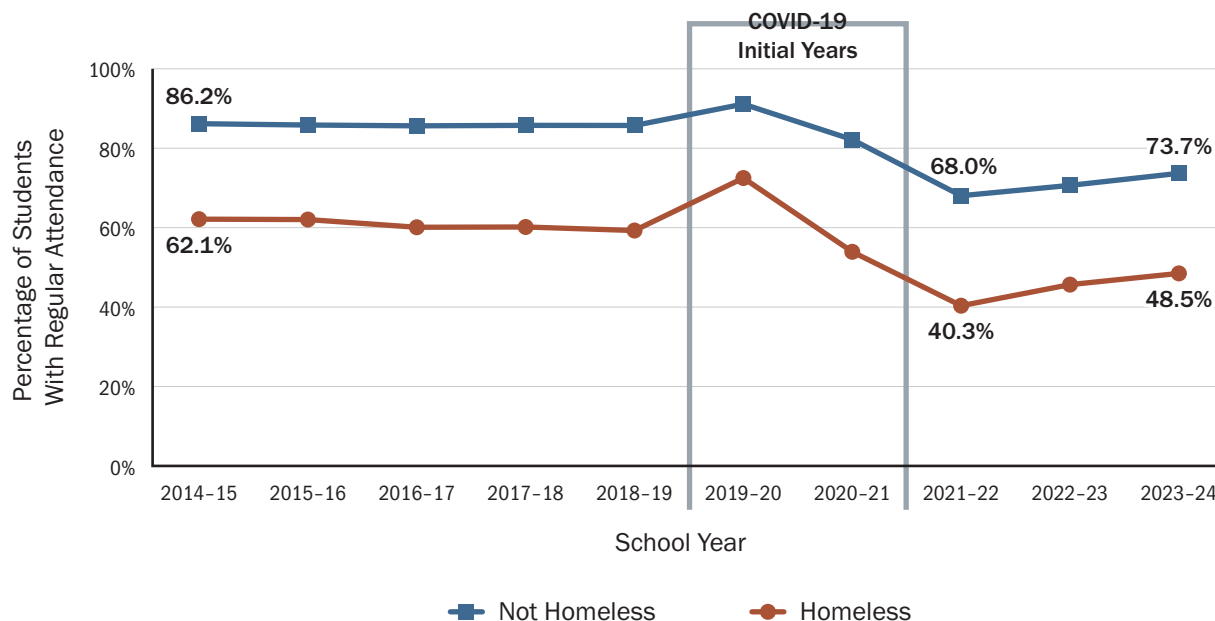
Interviews with staff in sample districts provided further insight into how district partnerships with organizations that received HSSP grants provided greater residential stability for many families.⁶¹ Two district liaisons noted how HSSP partners both provided housing for families currently experiencing homelessness, and, through early intervention, helped prevent homelessness for many more who were at risk of homelessness. Speaking to the value of their HSSP partnership, one liaison commented, "It has allowed this section of families that we would have no resources for to be able to access a resource, to get them safely housed, and we've seen some great successes [with] that."

Attendance

Another important student outcome measure is school attendance and absences. Improved attendance is highly correlated with student learning outcomes, and the hope is that improved school stability will result in improved attendance and, ultimately, in greater learning. However, our analyses of changes in attendance provide a more mixed picture than our analyses of changes in school mobility, further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic impact it had on school attendance.⁶² Interviews with district staff also highlighted some of the challenges of translating funding and greater stability into more consistent attendance.

Regular attendance is defined on the Washington State Report Card as having fewer than two absences per month, on average, over time—equivalent to attending 90% or more of school days over a 180-day academic year.⁶³ State-level data, shown in [Figure 7](#), show that regular attendance for Washington students experiencing homelessness was considerably lower than for their stably housed peers. These rates remained relatively stable in school years 2014–15 through 2018–19, leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁴ Regular attendance rates fell substantially for all students in the state immediately following the pandemic. In the years since, rates of regular attendance for students experiencing homelessness have risen somewhat more rapidly than those of their stably housed peers, from around 40% in 2021–22 to nearly 49% in 2023–24 (compared to stably housed students, for whom rates rose from 68% to 74% over the same period). However, regular attendance rates for both groups have remained lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 7. Percentage of Washington Students With Regular Attendance, by Homelessness Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24



Notes: Regular attendance is defined on the Washington State Report Card as having fewer than two absences per month, on average, over time. The bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during portions of which many schools were closed to in-person instruction.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *WA SQSS reports, 2014–15 to 2023–24* [Datasets]. <https://data.wa.gov> (accessed 12/16/2024).

To investigate further, we created a different metric—“absence rate”—from an administrative dataset received from OSPI. This metric represents the percentage of school days a student was absent, as calculated by the number of days absent divided by the cumulative days attended in a given school year. We followed the same analytic method used above for mobility. We again examined changes in this outcome—absence rates—in our matched-comparison sample of students experiencing homelessness in funded (HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento) and unfunded districts. In contrast to the mobility findings, we did not find a significant association between districts receiving funding and reduced absence rates after accounting for district- and student-level characteristics (see [Table A3](#) in [Appendix A](#)).

While we did not find statistically significant changes in absence rates in our matched-comparison analyses, some individual districts did observe decreases in absences among their students experiencing homelessness overall and among targeted subsets of these students. Indeed, interviews with district homeless liaisons in all but one of the districts included in our qualitative research—districts receiving HSSEP funding in 4 or more years—identified improved attendance among targeted subsets of students in their districts, such as unaccompanied youth. Specifically, some interviewees attributed this improved attendance to academic coaching and more intensive interventions in which school staff directly followed up with students experiencing homelessness who were absent. Others described improvements for these students as resulting from addressing barriers to attendance, such as providing them with proper outerwear in winter.

Interviews with district officials provided further insight into the challenges associated with improving attendance, focusing on the importance of districts being able to reorganize transportation quickly as families changed living arrangements. Some districts noted improvements in organizing transportation. For example, as noted earlier, one district worked with its regional educational service district to provide a multidistrict approach to transportation, which increased attendance for students residing outside the boundaries of their school district. Other districts created transportation hubs, sometimes coordinating these with after-school activities for students experiencing homelessness to simultaneously address after-school care.

However, transportation remained an ongoing challenge for many districts. For example, one liaison spoke of the practical challenges of reorganizing transportation in a large district serving many schools:

You add one kid on a bus, and it affects three to four schools, and so it takes time to get an efficient bus route. Those are excused absences. They are not the result of the family's lack of effort, or the district's. We can find you a program to address issues at school, for why you don't want to come to school. We can work with your school counselor to change those issues that are related to truancy. But some of the others, that systemic "how we get kids to school"—it's just hard, and it costs a lot of money.

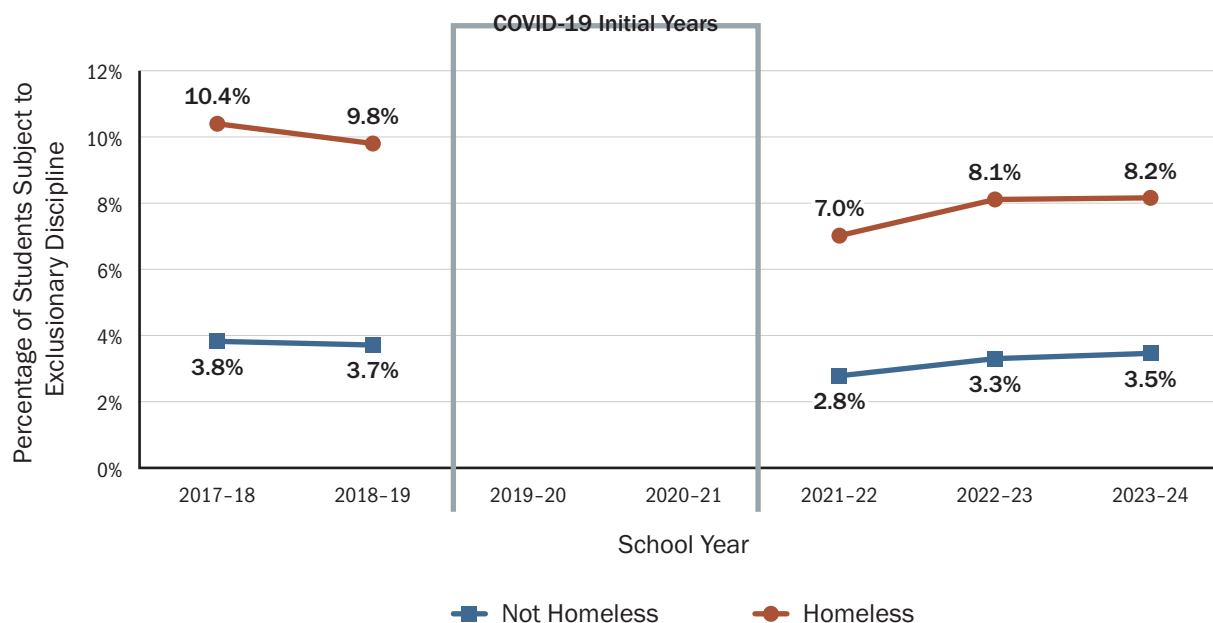
Exclusionary Discipline

Exclusionary discipline is also an important outcome to consider. Discipline rates are both a measure of school climate and a marker of students' experience with school. Previous research finds that the experience of homelessness can be traumatic, and students may feel isolated, leading to behavioral challenges that can incur disciplinary action.⁶⁵ Exclusionary discipline, in turn, can be harmful and lead to further disengagement from school.⁶⁶ Consequently, higher exclusionary discipline rates are associated with lower academic outcomes, including risk of dropout.⁶⁷ By contrast, restorative justice practices can lower rates of exclusionary discipline and are correlated with greater stability; improved school climate, mental health, and students' sense of belonging in school; and improved academic achievement.⁶⁸

Publicly reported data, illustrated in [Figure 8](#), show that for both stably housed students and those experiencing homelessness, discipline rates statewide decreased in the 2 years leading up to the COVID-19 but have again increased in the 3 years of available data since, albeit to lower-than-pre-pandemic levels. The rate of exclusionary discipline (suspension or expulsion) for students experiencing homelessness was 8.2% in 2023–24, around 2.3 times that of their stably housed peers (3.5%). Although this difference in exclusionary discipline rates has decreased from 5 years prior, when students experiencing homelessness were 2.6 times more likely to be excluded through disciplinary action, substantial disparities remain.

Discipline data were not available for the years prior to the instantiation of the HSSEP and HSSP programs. Thus, we did not analyze the association between grant funding and changes in discipline rates.

Figure 8. Percentage of Washington Students Subject to Exclusionary Discipline, by Homelessness Status, 2017–18 to 2023–24



Notes: The years 2019–20 and 2020–21 are excluded from this analysis due to the prevalence of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates these years.

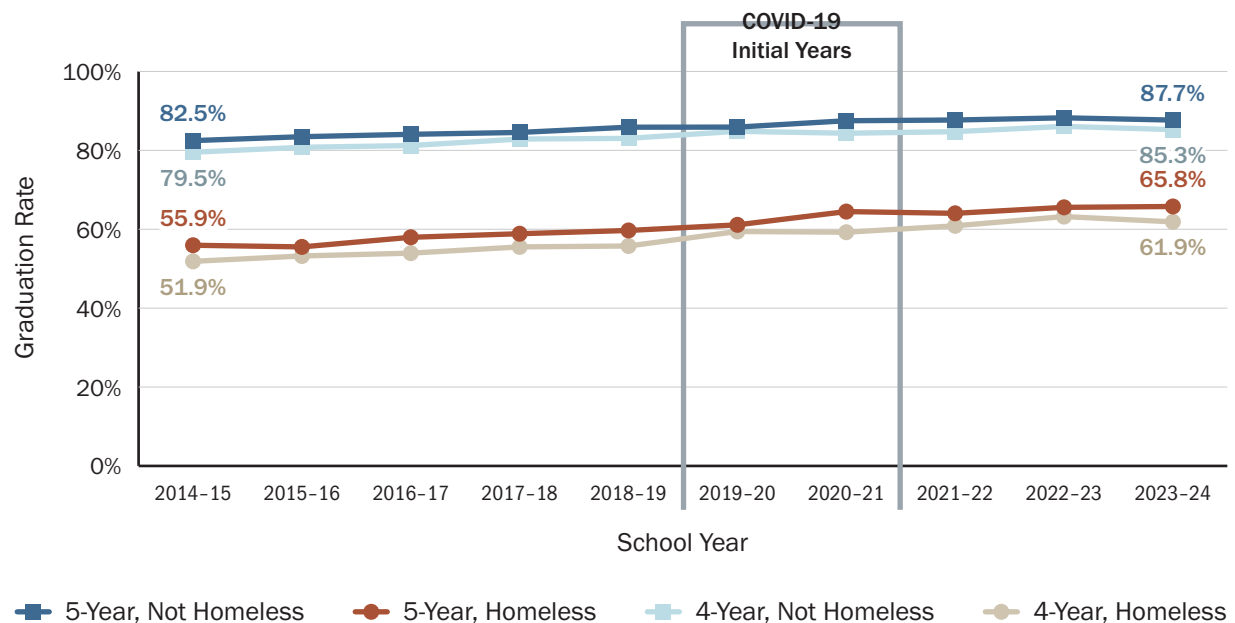
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Graduation Rates

High school graduation is an important additional measure, given its status as a crucial milestone for students experiencing homelessness. A 2019 study found that lack of a high school diploma or GED was the largest risk factor for experiencing homelessness beyond school.⁶⁹ High school graduation is influenced by many in-school and out-of-school factors across the course of a student’s schooling and therefore may be less directly affected by state-level funds to support students experiencing homelessness. However, interviewees indicated that some districts applied funds to support high school students experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youth with academic tutoring and in attaining sufficient credits, helping move these students toward graduation. Additionally, graduation rates provide valuable information on how students experiencing homelessness are faring in the school system.⁷⁰

State data displayed in [Figure 9](#) show that Washington’s 4-year and 5-year graduation rates have risen steadily for all students over the past decade and have risen at even greater rates for students experiencing homelessness.⁷¹ Specifically, the 5-year graduation rate for students experiencing homelessness increased by 10 percentage points over 10 years, from 56% in 2014–15 to 66% in 2023–24. This compares with a rise from 82% to 88% for stably housed students over the same period.

Figure 9. Washington State 4-Year and 5-Year High School Graduation Rates, by Homelessness Status, 2014–15 to 2023–24



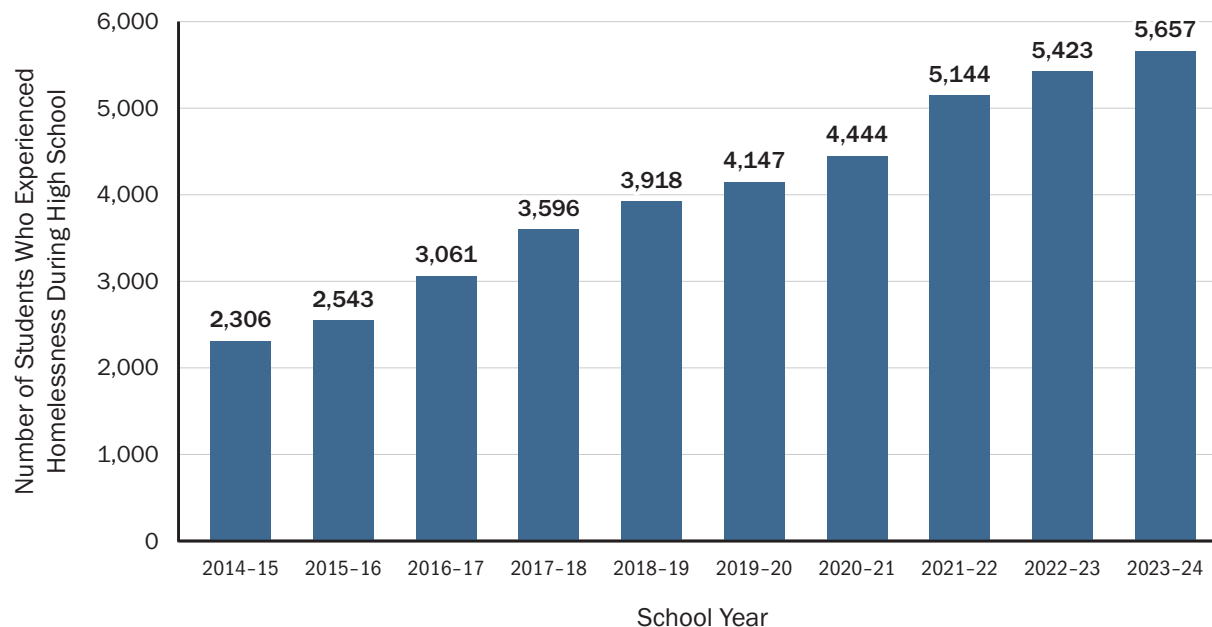
Notes: The bracketed region (2019–20 and 2020–21) indicates the initial years of the COVID-19 pandemic, during portions of which many schools were closed to in-person instruction. Washington graduation pathways changed following the passage of H.B. 1599 in 2019, and some graduation requirements were waived between 2020 and 2024 in the wake of the pandemic.

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Report card graduation 2014–15 to 2023–24 [Datasets]. <https://data.wa.gov> (accessed 12/16/2024).

Moreover, the increase in graduation rates takes place against a backdrop of increases in identification. Taken together, these data show even larger *total* numbers of students identified as experiencing homelessness are now graduating high school. Publicly reported state data show the number of students in the adjusted 5-year cohort of students identified as having experienced homelessness during high school more than doubled from 4,122 in 2014–15 to 8,601 in 2023–24. Over this period, the number of students who experienced homelessness in each cohort who graduated increased by nearly 2.5 times, from 2,306 in 2014–15 to 5,657 in 2023–24. (See Figure 10.)

Likewise, publicly reported data show that the proportion of high school students experiencing homelessness who took at least one dual-credit course increased by 10 percentage points from 44% in 2017–18 to over 54% in 2023–24—a slightly larger increase than that among their stably housed peers, whose rates increased from 60% to 68% over the same period. Dual-credit courses can provide exposure for students to college-level study, supporting academic preparation for college or career beyond school.⁷²

Figure 10. Number of Students in the 5-Year Graduating Cohort Who Experienced Homelessness During High School, 2014–15 to 2023–24



Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Report card graduation 2014–15 to 2023–24 [Datasets]. <https://data.wa.gov> (accessed 12/16/2024).

As graduation rates increased for both students who were and students who were not experiencing homelessness, and especially in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, these increases are likely attributable to multiple factors, including a combination of policies that removed previous barriers to graduation while also providing support for students experiencing homelessness. Among these, H.B. 1599 (passed in 2019) is particularly important. It provided an additional set of graduation pathway options to replace the stand-alone requirement that students pass state standardized assessments before graduation.⁷³ These include performance-based options, a sequence of career and technical education courses, state assessments, or a combination of these.

This shift toward multiple graduation pathways was coupled with early monitoring of student performance in the form of 9th-grade on-track measures.⁷⁴ This indicator shows whether a student in 9th grade for the first time has completed all course credits they attempted, a measure strongly correlated with high school graduation.⁷⁵ Additionally, the state introduced a 2020–24 waiver of some graduation requirements for students who were expected to graduate, had demonstrated postsecondary preparation, and whose education had been significantly disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives under the state's Building Bridges framework (such as opportunities for credit recovery) and avenues to reengage students who have dropped out (such as the state's Open Doors program) have also provided greater flexibility to allow students to graduate.⁷⁶ This may be especially important for students experiencing homelessness and particularly for unaccompanied youth, whose educational careers are more likely to be interrupted.

Nonetheless, interviews with district officials evidenced how HSSEP funding also played a key role in grantee districts. In one large grant-receiving district, the student support services director shared that HSSEP funds were used to staff resource navigators who work directly with students experiencing homelessness and apply targeted interventions such as tutoring and credit retrieval. Together, these strategies elevated the district's graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness above state averages.

Several of the representatives we interviewed from grantee districts reported high school graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness that meaningfully exceeded state averages. This was especially pronounced in districts that had intentionally focused grant funding toward working closely with high school students experiencing homelessness, including unaccompanied youth. For example, one district liaison commented, "Increased graduation rates have corresponded with addition of homeless community specialists," funded through HSSEP grants. In another, smaller district, the liaison noted how high school resource navigators (a role analogous to case managers) had played a key role:

Before we had HSSEP money, our graduation rate for McKinney-Vento [students] was 45%. And since we've had this person [the high school resource navigator] in place, it's been between 80% and 100% every year. We've had this grant for [several] years now, and so it's a huge jump.

The same liaison noted that high school resource navigators could also prepare students for life beyond high school:

Having that dedicated person at the school, especially for the seniors, and helping them not only graduate, but figure out what they want to do after graduation, if it's not necessarily college, what is it? Do they want to go to a trade school? Do they want to just try to find a job? What would that look like? How would they pay their bills? All of the things that the kids don't think about, or you know, they don't have to think about until they need to.

Interpreting Student Outcomes

The data presented above illustrate some encouraging developments for the state's population of students experiencing homelessness, although it is not possible from the available data to tease out the precise role the Homeless Student Stability programs played in bringing about these trends. Washington has seen an increase in the number and proportion of students identified as experiencing homelessness over the last decade, and this rate has increased more rapidly in districts receiving federal and/or state funding to support students experiencing homelessness.

Improvements in school stability for students experiencing homelessness are especially encouraging, given that increased school stability is a core intention of the Homeless Student Stability programs. Additionally, our analyses of matched-comparison student-level data provide a strong indication that district receipt of HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funds is a contributing factor in improving student stability. The statewide increase in graduation rates for students

Our analyses of matched-comparison student-level data provide a strong indication that district receipt of HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funds is a contributing factor in improving student stability.

experiencing homelessness, and the narrowing of the gap between students experiencing homelessness and stably housed students, is also particularly promising given the importance of high school graduation to later life outcomes. While improved graduation rates were likely influenced by a combination of factors, including state policy changes and new programs, our interview data indicated that HSSEP-funded resources and interventions contributed to improved graduation rates for targeted student groups, such as high school students experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied students.

Indeed, an important feature of the HSSEP grants is that they have allowed districts to assess specific needs in their jurisdictions and apply grant funding in ways that best supported those needs. Some districts focused funds on building the capacity of their district homeless liaison offices; some staffed high school resource navigators, who worked closely with subsets of students; others staffed resource navigators who connected families with community resources. And in those districts with HSSEP partner organizations, still more supports ranged from housing to health care. Districts receiving HSSEP funding can reasonably be expected to have had differential impacts on different groups of students depending on how funding was allocated.

Within individual districts, interviews with district representatives showed how they used funds to support attendance and engagement for those students experiencing homelessness who were receiving more intensive services. While these pockets of success appear promising, our quantitative analysis did not find a direct association between grant receipt and attendance rates for students experiencing homelessness. Similarly, statewide patterns in exclusionary discipline rates showed a decrease for all students in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, but only a small decrease in disparities between students experiencing homelessness and their stably housed peers. Such persistent gaps indicate the important work that remains.

These findings are also not entirely surprising for two primary reasons. For one, interviewees explained that the large majority of students experiencing homelessness in grantee districts did *not* receive the more intensive services that might be most likely to move the needle on these outcomes. Positive effects for the small subsets of students who did receive such supports could easily be muted when outcomes for the full set of students experiencing homelessness are analyzed. Second, literature on student homelessness suggests that these more distal outcomes (i.e., attendance and discipline) are also influenced by a host of additional factors, including district and school policies.⁷⁷

When interpreting the student outcomes data presented above, it is also important to note that there are limitations to the matched-comparison method used to analyze students' school mobility and attendance patterns. [Appendix A](#) provides more detailed information on these limitations. Accordingly, we characterize these matched-comparison results as preliminary.

Data and Funding Implications

The descriptions of program implementation and services provided in previous sections show the different ways in which the Homeless Student Stability programs and related policies fostered increased support for Washington students experiencing homelessness. The data provided in the previous section indicate improvements in some key statewide student metrics in the period since the state established the Homeless Student Stability programs, while substantial disparities remain in others. In this section, we consider the role of data in assessing current and future program impact and discuss how elevated and sustained levels of funding could support improved outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

Using Data for Analysis and Improvement

Our interviews suggested that sample districts receiving grant funding had improved their ability to provide targeted supports to specific students, with improved outcomes for these subsets of students. However, we also found variation among sample districts in the type and frequency of data collected. Given the variation in caseloads district liaisons described, this may also reflect district capacity. This meant that while liaisons were able to demonstrate how funding was used to support students and to describe the strategies used, many did not have access to more fine-grained data about which students received which interventions. Given the range of strategies used at the local level, this limits our ability to make stronger claims regarding the extent to which funding caused these outcomes.

States considering implementing similar programs to support students experiencing homelessness may wish to consider a role for state-level support of data collection and analysis in ways that minimize additional district liaison burden. Analyses could combine data from district liaison offices with other district data. Data elements could include measures to assess student residential mobility, access to school transportation, and specific support services received and how these relate to outcomes such as attendance and exclusionary discipline. Such measures could help the state develop a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the relationship between program implementation and outcomes. Additionally, such findings could then be shared with district liaisons to further support school stability and learning.

Sustainable Funding to Support Students

The above findings suggest that increased funding can contribute to improved outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. For this study, we asked interviewees about the level of state funding that might be needed to more fully support this student group. First, interviewees nearly universally noted that the federal McKinney-Vento program was underfunded, with only about 10% of the state's school districts receiving subgrants. Districts not receiving subgrants must still comply with the provisions of the act, but without designated McKinney-Vento funds to support their work. Even for those districts that did receive federal subgrants, these amounts were relatively small, with a median grant size of just under \$47,000 in 2024–25 (see [Table 2](#))—typically insufficient to fund a full-time district homeless liaison. In discussing the role of the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP), one interviewee asserted:

What was most striking to me was how many rural school districts were just asking for supplemental funding for their McKinney-Vento liaison, because it just wasn't possible for them to keep somebody on full-time with the amount that was allocated to them.

Another interviewee described what “fully funded” McKinney-Vento support would look like, saying, “School districts would hire a liaison that has the time and capacity to do all the work that’s actually prescribed in the law, and that’s not there right now.” While the interviewee acknowledged that some small districts had fewer than 30 identified students experiencing homelessness and may not need a full-time liaison, this represented less than half of the districts in the state and less than 3% of the state’s students identified as experiencing homelessness.⁷⁸ With federal funding limited, the state-funded HSSEP grants therefore provided recipient districts with important supplementary funding to identify and support students. As one interviewee noted:

HSSEP has allowed us to get a better idea of the [scope] of the problem. ... Once we have a better idea of how many kids are in crisis, the more urgency we can have and the more options we can create for solutions as well.

The limited funding to support students experiencing homelessness has meant that district homeless liaisons often have multiple roles within their districts, constraining the time they have available for their McKinney-Vento duties. The addition of HSSEP funding meant that more districts received funding that could support this important work. In the 2 years prior to the establishment of HSSEP, just 8% of districts received McKinney-Vento funding. Since the implementation of HSSEP, between 10% and 18% of districts received either or both McKinney-Vento and HSSEP funds in any given year, representing between 23% and 58% of students experiencing homelessness in the state.⁷⁹

Most district interviewees agreed that the HSSEP program provided valuable supplemental funding to districts, citing school-level resource navigators and dedicated counseling and case management as examples of impactful services facilitated through the additional funding. Yet with median district grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$76,799 over the lifetime of the program, interviewees also agreed that the scale of funds needed to fully serve students experiencing homelessness still greatly exceeded that of combined federal and state funding under the McKinney-Vento and HSSEP programs. In other words, the scale of the challenge still outpaced the availability of resources to address it.

The scale of funds needed to fully serve students experiencing homelessness still greatly exceeded that of combined federal and state funding under the McKinney-Vento and HSSEP programs.

A 2019 state auditor’s report reached similar conclusions. This report noted that combined HSSEP and McKinney-Vento funding at the time was less than 10% of the \$28.6 million that districts indicated they spent on district homeless liaisons, staff training, student transportation, and student enrollments and fees.⁸⁰ (This \$28.6 million projection was equivalent to approximately \$850 per identified student experiencing homelessness.⁸¹)

We did not find consensus among interviewees regarding what represented an appropriate and manageable caseload for staff, and thus a suitable level of funding. Districts differed in the levels of need among students and families, the different strategies and supports they applied, and the nature of services available in each district. Nonetheless, experience with an influx of funding from the American

Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth program (approximately \$12 million statewide) provided insight into what might be possible in a more fully funded environment available to a wider selection of districts. As one state official explained:

We had districts that suddenly were able to identify kids; send their liaison to training; pay their liaison a little bit more; have their liaison work during the summer, because we know that homeless families continue to be homeless after the school year ends. And ... they were able to use those funds and leverage some of the creative ideas that they had in the district to just really enhance and implement programs. The fact that they could use it for technology, capital outlay—which they’ve never been able to do before—allowed districts to purchase things like washers and dryers for kids. And supporting the basic needs of kids helped districts, I think, to reshape what they thought they could do with these dollars. I was sad to see them go away. It made a big difference for kids; it made a big difference for districts. We know that McKinney-Vento is underfunded. And so for once, we actually had a better idea of what it would be like to have enough money.

Interviewees also agreed that because HSSEP and HSSP funding are allocated as competitive grants, they are viewed as uncertain sources of year-to-year district funding, presenting challenges with program sustainability and staff retention. Recent state budget challenges caused a reduction in funding for the HSSEP from \$2.5 million in 2024–25 to \$1.2 million in 2025–26 and left 2026–27 funding contingent on further legislative actions in 2026. While 2026–27 funds were eventually appropriated, these circumstances further highlight funding sustainability concerns. In order for funding to adequately meet the needs of districts to support students experiencing homelessness, grants would need to be consistently available and predictable from year to year. More overall funds allocated to students experiencing homelessness could also allow some of the funding to be disbursed via formula, reaching students experiencing homelessness in districts that currently do not receive competitive grant funds.

Lessons and Policy Considerations

Washington is one of relatively few states that provide funding to support students experiencing homelessness. For the past decade, the state's Homeless Student Stability programs—the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) and Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP)—and associated policies have provided valuable support to this vulnerable population of students. This provides proof of concept for what can be achieved with a relatively modest investment that supplements funds from the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, facilitating a greater focus on student homelessness within and beyond the state education infrastructure.

Since the Homeless Student Stability programs and complementary policies were introduced, there has been meaningful improvements in identification, school stability, and graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness. Improvements in these measures have been most pronounced in grantee districts. Additionally, some HSSEP grantee districts reported improved academic outcomes for subsets of students experiencing homelessness in the presence of more intensive services.

Washington's implementation of the Homeless Student Stability programs offers numerous points of reference for actors in other states interested in learning from and replicating elements of the programs and other associated aspects of state policy. The successes as well as the challenges of statewide policy development and local implementation are instructive here. Interviewees reflected on a range of lessons, including considerations for states—primarily related to program oversight, cross-agency coordination, and decision-making about funding—and considerations related to local-level implementation. Key lessons, grouped according to these categories, are discussed below.

State Implementation

Build capacity within the state education agency to support students experiencing homelessness.

Within a state education agency, dedicating sufficient staffing specifically to aid districts and schools in supporting students experiencing homelessness can help foster robust practices within and beyond grantee districts. Most state McKinney-Vento coordinators are not full-time in their roles, which limits their ability to fulfill their requirements under the act.⁸² It is important to staff state offices sufficiently to accommodate the administration of both federal and state programs. In Washington state, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) added staff and created a dedicated full-time equivalent (FTE) role to oversee HSSEP program implementation, which were important first steps to build capacity, support effective grant administration, and facilitate coordination with the Department of Commerce and other relevant agencies. As one interviewee explained:

It was written into the bill language that it would only pass if there was an FTE to administer the grants and oversee the program. ... And that ... allowed for better administration of the program, and better coordination at the state level, for a [separate] person to handle that program.

Since then, OSPI's infrastructure for supporting students experiencing homelessness has grown substantially, encompassing as many as six personnel simultaneously working on behalf of this student group. This staffing structure has allowed for robust, frequent statewide technical assistance and training for district- and building-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness, regardless

of whether a district is an HSSEP or McKinney-Vento grantee. Key personnel inside and outside of the state education agency believe this has created a “rising tide lifts all boats” effect that explains some of the statewide trends in outcomes for all students experiencing homelessness, including improved identification and graduation rates. According to one interviewee:

Because we’re creating artifacts and ... we have communities of practice where anybody can join in, I think it’s allowing us to leverage the funds [to have] a much broader impact than [on] just the districts that are receiving HSSEP dollars.

Consider placing oversight responsibility for certain broader issues related to student, family, and youth homelessness outside the state education agency. Prior to 2015, issues relating to students experiencing homelessness that were beyond the purview of the state education agency did not have a “home” in a state agency and were at risk of falling through the cracks. Because student homelessness is a multifaceted challenge whose root causes and solutions reach far beyond the education system, key personnel involved with Washington’s Homeless Student Stability programs explained that the 2015 establishment of the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) within the Department of Commerce was mission-critical in making a housing-focused student program like HSSP possible. As one interviewee explained, the establishment of OHY “gave a lot of leverage for the office to engage in ... policy spaces, policy development, shaping solutions, in ways that not every state agency or program is engaged in.”

Establishing an analogous agency to Washington’s OHY is a substantial undertaking and is certainly not the only way for other states to broaden available supports for students experiencing homelessness. Other strategies, like interagency task forces, are also worthy of consideration.⁸³ Still, the key role of OHY in Washington suggests that states would benefit from thinking critically about what entities—existing or new—could appropriately complement and build on the work of the state education agency. An additional consideration for Washington policymakers, as well as officials in other states, is how to ensure state agencies more comprehensively address the needs of all school-age students experiencing homelessness, beyond the youth age 12–24 on whom OHY’s work is focused.

Foster early and ongoing cross-agency coordination. Explicit early and ongoing cross-agency coordination is crucial to building a holistic set of supports for students experiencing homelessness and their families. Administering HSSP through OHY and HSSEP through OSPI empowers each agency to draw on its particular area of expertise. At the same time, the interconnected nature of these programs—also a key design feature intended to address the challenge of student homelessness from multiple angles—underscores the need for substantial cross-agency relationship building and collaboration to realize the programs’ potential, both at the outset and on an ongoing basis. As one interviewee illustrated:

The whole point of this is to [facilitate] partnerships [among] folks who are not historically funded or structured to work together. And so a critical piece of this is ... [to] make sure that the folks who are not already working together [start] working together.

Specifically, developing a clear shared understanding of each agency’s relevant practices, systems, and constraints from the beginning of program implementation can go a long way toward building joint knowledge and trust. Washington’s state agencies made strong progress in this area, although there were some gaps that policymakers and practitioners in other states can learn from. For example,

one interviewee noted that personnel working from the education side initially did not have a strong understanding of the state homeless response system, which limited the support they could provide to districts working to connect families with appropriate services.

On the other hand, Washington offers multiple examples of replicable good practices around maintaining cross-agency collaboration over time. To help housing providers and school district grantees refine the direct services they provide to students experiencing homelessness and their families, OHY and OSPI jointly operate a community of practice for HSSP and HSSEP grantees. Staff at each agency also review and score applications for the other agency's program (i.e., OSPI staff review HSSP grant applications from housing providers and OHY staff review HSSEP grant applications from districts), which allows staff at each agency to both build and leverage their understanding of the other agency's portion of the work.

Washington offers multiple examples of replicable good practices around maintaining cross-agency collaboration over time.

Anticipate an increase in the number of students who are identified as experiencing homelessness.

Once states and districts dedicate more attention and funding to the issue, increases in identification rates are to be expected as districts build capacity and improve systems for identifying students experiencing homelessness. Student homelessness identification rates have increased statewide since Washington passed legislation in 2019 that required building-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness. These rates have increased more rapidly in districts that received targeted funding in the form of HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento grants to identify and support students experiencing homelessness. State and district personnel from Washington described this phenomenon as a logical function of improved training and awareness of what signs to screen for. As one interviewee explained, "It's not that we have more kids [experiencing homelessness], necessarily. It's just that we've done so much training and intensive work with school district staff that they understand what they're looking for and are more likely to identify kids." Accordingly, improved identification rates can be understood, at least in part, as a more accurate measure of a problem that was already occurring, rather than automatically signaling that the problem itself is getting worse.

Strengthen data tracking to identify program services and outcomes. Encouraging more robust data collection would enable districts and states to accurately identify program impacts. The HSSEP program provides districts with discretion to use funds to best support the needs of students in their jurisdictions. Due to resource constraints, grantee districts frequently focused their most intensive, targeted supports, such as case management and tutoring, on a subset of students experiencing homelessness—for example, unaccompanied students or those exhibiting particular academic or behavioral risk factors. Similarly, in districts with memoranda of understanding with community housing providers through the HSSP grant, a targeted subset of students experiencing homelessness and their families received HSSP services. This feature of grant implementation means that, to more accurately assess grant outcomes, district and state data systems would need to tag students who receive more targeted services.

Washington does not currently require grantees to track students at this level of granularity. As a result, analyzing student outcomes among grant recipients requires looking broadly at outcomes for all students experiencing homelessness in these districts, even though the majority did not receive the targeted services and supports hypothesized to lead to the greatest improvements in outcomes. More precise data collection in district and state data systems regarding which students received which specific services could inform future state investment as well as program improvement. Technical assistance from the state education agency or partner organizations could help already-stretched district homeless liaisons track and use data, ensuring that this additional responsibility does not become overly burdensome and that staff collect and use data in accordance with data privacy regulations.

Align state policy with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. McKinney-Vento can serve as an important scaffold for states looking to build services and supports for students and families experiencing homelessness. Interviewees explained that McKinney-Vento was especially valuable in defining the conditions under which a student is considered to be experiencing homelessness; creating parameters for allowable use of funds, which Washington emulated when determining allowable uses for the HSSEP funds in particular; and creating a mandate for the rights of students experiencing homelessness. Further, Washington built on McKinney-Vento best practice in mandating building-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness. When developing supplemental supports for students experiencing homelessness, other states would be well served to follow Washington's lead in building these aspects of McKinney-Vento into their own legislation.

Consider avenues to increase the scale and enhance the sustainability of funding. McKinney-Vento provides a key structure establishing the rights of students experiencing homelessness and the responsibilities of state education agencies and school districts to support them. Yet, with limited funding, McKinney-Vento also exists as an underfunded mandate for many school districts within and beyond the state of Washington. In Washington, HSSEP grants have extended the reach of funding to districts enrolling a substantially larger proportion of the students experiencing homelessness across the state than those whose districts received McKinney-Vento grants alone. However, there remains a large disparity between the funding available and the scale of need, as evidenced both by the proportion of students experiencing homelessness in nonfunded districts and by the reality that resource constraints limit valuable, more intensive services like case management and tutoring to small subsets of students experiencing homelessness in grantee districts.

Moreover, as grant funds are often used to pay for personnel to support students experiencing homelessness, predictability of funding is important. Policymakers, both within Washington and in states looking to emulate its investments, are encouraged to assess and consider avenues to close the gap between need and funding. State policymakers are also encouraged to consider the costs and benefits of strategies like multiyear grants or formula funding to ensure greater predictability of funding at the local level from year to year. Further, states could provide guidance to districts on set-aside amounts under Title I, Part A and on strategies to maximize the use of these funds to meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness.⁸⁴ (According to SchoolHouse Connection, as of 2025 the majority of state education agencies did not yet provide such guidance.⁸⁵)

Local Implementation

Build strong district–community partnerships. Interviewees frequently cited close community partnerships as especially important for supporting students experiencing homelessness and their families. Regardless of whether a district has a formal HSSEP partner, district collaboration and warm handoffs—with housing-specific organizations and other community-based partners (e.g., YMCA/YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Elks, Rotary, United Way, Catholic Charities)—are both common and extensive in districts receiving repeat HSSEP grants. These community partners appear to play a crucial role over and above what the school and district are able to provide, both in resource provision for families and, often, in referrals and resource navigation or case management. Community partners have also played a key role in initial and ongoing policy advocacy. Interviewees explained that across the state, such partnerships have become both increasingly common and increasingly robust over time. Establishing and managing these community partnerships is among the many important responsibilities of the district homeless liaison.

Establish and support building-level points of contact. Requiring or incentivizing building-level points of contact for students and families experiencing homelessness can create a powerful lever for increasing identification and more fully meeting student needs. In addition to the required district homeless liaison, providing building-level points of contact for students experiencing homelessness was a best practice under McKinney-Vento that the Washington legislature turned into a mandate in 2019. District representatives interviewed for this study shared that building-level points of contact—most commonly school counselors, school social workers, or front office staff—have been instrumental in both identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness. Providing appropriate training and carving out sufficient time from other school responsibilities can help prepare building-level points of contact to succeed in supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Given their many competing responsibilities, providing standardized tools and resources for building-level points of contact is another replicable best practice. For example, one HSSEP grantee district created templates for building-level points of contact to fill out common forms, developed scripts for topics that come up frequently in conversations with support providers or with families, and provided information about filing appeals with agencies when initial requests for support have been denied.

Enable dedicated time for district homeless liaisons. The responsibilities of the district homeless liaison are extensive and require dedicated time. Even in smaller districts with relatively few students experiencing homelessness, responsibilities such as facilitating and navigating community partnerships, writing grants, and training school-level staff to identify and support students experiencing homelessness—all on top of providing direct supports and services—are demanding and time-consuming. Carving out dedicated FTE roles for district homeless liaisons appears crucial to their ability to coordinate and provide the appropriate services. To this end, a replicable best practice involves removing district homeless liaisons from hybrid positions wherever feasible. When a full-time role solely focused on student homelessness is not feasible, hybrid roles could be structured to be complementary (e.g., concurrently working on family engagement) and not conflicting.

Blend and braid funds to support students experiencing homelessness. Districts with robust supports for students experiencing homelessness have been creative in blending and braiding funding from a variety of sources. In districts that received HSSEP grants in multiple years, HSSEP funds have been an important

piece of the puzzle, often helping fund the district liaison position and resource navigator positions at schools with high concentrations of students experiencing homelessness. To more fully address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, though, districts have needed to combine funding from a range of sources that substantially exceeds what the HSSEP grant could fund on its own. Common additional funding sources in interviewee districts included McKinney-Vento pass-through grants, targeted use of the Title I funds (including, but not limited to, the Title I, Part A homeless set-aside), and grants or in-kind services from local community partners. District homeless liaisons have also closely engaged with other district programs or offices that provide complementary services to broader subsets of students. For example, several districts have Family and Community Resource Centers that are available to all students but are leveraged especially frequently to support students experiencing homelessness and their families.

Appendix A: Research Methods and Model Results

Qualitative Methods

We conducted interviews with a range of stakeholders, including representatives of district, governmental, community, and advocacy organizations. We used a purposive sampling approach, with interviewees selected based on their experience with and knowledge of the origins and/or implementation of the Homeless Student Stability programs. Interviewees included seven homeless liaisons in districts that had received Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP) funding in 4 or more years since the inception of the program in 2016–17; four staff members at Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) grantee organizations that had received funding in 3 or more years since the inception of the program in 2016–17; five state policymakers and personnel at state agencies; and seven current and former staff members of nongovernmental and advocacy organizations.

In total, we interviewed these 23 individuals over 21 interviews, with interviews typically lasting 45–60 minutes. Interviews used a semi-structured protocol. Questions addressed the origins of the HSSEP and HSSP programs, the services provided to students, collaboration among organizations, and the perceived impact on students and families. Interviews were transcribed for clarity and analyzed by multiple researchers to identify key themes.

Quantitative Methods

To investigate various outcomes for students experiencing homelessness, we used both publicly available data sources and administrative datasets received under agreement from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Public data sources included state report card data available at <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>. We also analyzed downloadable public use datasets from <https://data.wa.gov/>. Because many report card data are collected during October of the school year, some numbers may differ from administrative datasets that reflect cumulative enrollment.

To investigate the impact of HSSEP funding on student outcomes, we analyzed a student-level dataset received from OSPI. We used a propensity score matching, a quasi-experimental research method in which matches are created between students in treated and untreated groups based on a series of relevant characteristics to ensure the matched sets of comparisons are equivalent at baseline. In each year of analysis, we created a matched student sample of students experiencing homelessness in districts receiving HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funding and those in districts not receiving funding, based on an array of student characteristics. This included an exact match on grade level, with propensity matching on gender; race and ethnicity; and prior-year outcomes including school mobility, absences, and previous year state assessments (where applicable). We used radius matching with a caliper to find closely matched students.

We then used a multiple regression model on the matched sample to explore changes in outcomes related to (1) school mobility during the school year, and (2) the percentage of enrolled days a student was absent. Regression models controlled for the same covariates as the matching model above—prior-year mobility, prior-year absence rate, prior-year assessment (English language arts and Math), prior-year experience of exclusionary discipline for the years where these data are available, and other student

characteristics—gender, race and ethnicity, English learner, and disability status—together with several district-level characteristics—prior-year district enrollment and demographics (percentage of students from low-income backgrounds, students experiencing homelessness, English learners, Black and Hispanic or Latino students) and district urbanicity.

While this method is much more rigorous than simply looking descriptively at changes in outcomes, one limitation is that we were unable to achieve close matches on students experiencing homelessness in districts receiving funding to those without funding by *also* matching on the district characteristics. Given that districts that received funding tended to be larger, be more urban, and have a higher proportion of students experiencing homelessness than those that did not receive funding, we cannot rule out additional confounding variables at the district level. Thus, while we cannot assert a causal effect given the different characteristics between grant-receiving and other districts, our student match-comparison design provides for a stronger inference that observed changes in mobility are primarily due to funding compared to multiple regression methods without matching.

Matching Method

The matched sample was created with a propensity score matching (PSM) method. In each year, the PSM model used a logistic regression to estimate the probability that a student experiencing homelessness was enrolled in a district receiving funding. The method used exact matching on student grade level and a propensity score based on: student gender; race and ethnicity; prior-year experience of school mobility, absences, and exclusionary discipline; prior-year test scores; and dummy variables for missing prior-year values. The logistic regression model is as follows:

$$\Pr(W_{dt} = 1 | X_{id}, Y_{id,t-1}, V_{id,t-1}) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\alpha + \beta'_1 X_{id} + \lambda' Y_{id,t-1} + \delta' V_{id,t-1})$$

Where,

- W_{dt} : District d receives HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento funding in year t .
- X_{id} : Demographic characteristics of student i in district d .
- $Y_{id,t-1}$: Prior-year outcomes for student i in district d .
- $V_{id,t-1}$: Prior-year achievement for student i in district d .

Impact Model

Using the matched sample, we applied a multiple regression model to outcomes of student mobility and absences. Where the outcome variable was a binary, the regression served as a linear probability model, reflecting the likelihood of that outcome. As with the matching model, we estimated outcomes in each year based on prior-year covariates. The regression model took the following form:

$$Y_{igdt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{funding}_{dt} + \theta' X_{id} + \lambda' Y_{id,t-1} + \delta' V_{id,t-1} + \varphi' Z_{d,t-1} + \gamma_g + \varepsilon_{igdt}$$

Where,

- Y_{igdt} : Outcome for student i , in grade g , district d , in year t .
- funding_{dt} : An indicator for receipt of HSSEP funding and/or McKinney-Vento funding for district d in year t .

- X_{id} : Demographic characteristics of student i in district d .
- $Y_{id,t-1}$: Prior-year outcomes for student i in district d .
- $V_{id,t-1}$: Prior-year achievement for student i in district d .
- $Z_{d,t-1}$: Prior-year district characteristics.
- γ_g : Grade-level fixed effects.

Prior-year outcomes included students' experience of mobility or absences in the previous year. Standard errors were clustered at the district level to account for students in each district being exposed to common policies. Matching weights were used to compare students in funded districts with weighted students in control districts, preserving the matching design.

Tables

Table A1 shows the number and percentage of students experiencing homelessness in the analytic dataset in funded (HSSEP and/or McKinney-Vento) and unfunded districts by year.

Table A1. Number and Percentage of Students Experiencing Homelessness by District Funding Status, 2016–17 to 2023–24

School year	Number/Percentage of SEH among all students	Did not receive MKV or HSSEP grant in year	Received MKV and/or HSSEP grant in year	Total
2016–17	Number	21,485	16,585	38,070
	Percentage	3.0%	4.0%	3.4%
2017–18	Number	18,633	20,459	39,092
	Percentage	2.7%	4.5%	3.4%
2018–19	Number	20,910	17,709	38,619
	Percentage	2.8%	4.5%	3.4%
2019–20	Number	17,824	18,079	35,903
	Percentage	2.5%	4.3%	3.1%
2020–21	Number	15,740	15,989	31,729
	Percentage	2.2%	4.0%	2.8%
2021–22	Number	18,375	18,016	36,391
	Percentage	2.6%	4.5%	3.3%
2022–23	Number	23,102	19,287	42,389
	Percentage	3.0%	5.4%	3.8%
2023–24	Number	18,071	29,235	47,306
	Percentage	3.2%	5.2%	4.2%

Notes: MKV = McKinney-Vento subgrant; HSSEP = Homeless Student Stability Education Program; SEH = students experiencing homelessness.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).

We ran models in each of the years 2017–18 through 2023–24. [Table A2](#) shows the regression outputs for the 2017–18 school year. As this was the first full year of HSSEP funding and occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a lower probability of missing confounding variables, and it provides the cleanest comparison. The coefficients for the key outcomes of interest (mobility and absences) in subsequent years are shown in [Table A3](#).

Table A2. Matched School Mobility and Absence Rates Regression Models, 2017–18

Variable	Changed schools during year (yes/no)	Absence rate (ln(pct. abs. + 1))
District received HSSEP or MKV in year	-0.027*	0.024
Lagged stud. mobility indicator	0.139**	-0.023
Lagged ln(+1) percent absence	0.061**	0.582**
Gender: Male	-0.003	-0.004
Race-ethnicity		
• Native Am./AI	-0.011	0.152**
• Asian	-0.005	-0.194**
• Black	-0.010	-0.077**
• Hispanic/Latino/a	-0.018+	0.008
• Pacific Isl./Nat. Haw	0.013	0.080*
• Two or more races	0.005	0.038*
• Unknown	0.082	-0.259
Limited English proficiency	0.031*	-0.168**
Disability (IEP)	0.006	0.041
Lagged std. ELA_z	-0.010*	-0.013
Lagged std. Math_z	-0.008*	-0.071**
Lagged dist. % low income	0.186**	0.310
Lagged dist. % English learners	-0.067	0.393
Lagged dist. % exp. homeless	-1.338**	-1.275**
Lagged dist. % Black	-0.004	0.375
Lagged dist. % Hispanic/Latino/a	-0.090	-0.313
Locale code (base: city)		
• Suburb	-0.007	0.008
• Town	-0.002	-0.048
• Rural	-0.011	-0.093
Lagged dist. enrollment	-0.000	0.000
Intercept	0.097**	0.908**
F-stat	36.21	117.57
Adj. R2	0.05	0.33
N	31,698	29,529

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. + $p < .10$.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of administrative dataset received from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).

Table A3 shows the coefficients for a district receiving HSSEP or McKinney-Vento funds in a given year for mobility and absence rates. The coefficients are those of the main predictor variable in Table A2, for each of the school years 2017–18 through 2023–24. The findings show a statistically significant relationship between HSSEP or McKinney-Vento funding and reduced school mobility. This held in all years except 2023–24. We did not find a statistically significant relationship between funding and absence rates in the matched sample after accounting for all other variables.

Table A3. Matched Sample Homelessness Funding Regression Coefficients: School Mobility and Absence Rates, 2017–18 to 2023–24

School year	Changed schools during year (yes/no)	Absence rate (ln(pct. abs. + 1))
2017–18	-0.027*	0.024
2018–19	-0.026*	0.009
2019–20	-0.029**	-0.034
2020–21	-0.027**	0.032
2021–22	-0.032**	0.043
2022–23	-0.035**	-0.024
2023–24	-0.016	0.010

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .10$.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of administrative dataset received from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2026).

Appendix B: Allowable Uses of Federal and State Program Funds

The McKinney-Vento program includes the following 16 categories of allowable uses:⁸⁶

1. Tutoring and supplemental instruction
2. Evaluations of student strengths and needs
3. Professional development for educators and support staff
4. Referrals for medical, dental, and mental health services
5. Transportation costs not otherwise funded
6. Early childhood education for preschool-aged homeless children
7. Services to engage students not enrolled in school
8. Before-school and after-school tutoring, mentoring, and summer programs
9. Records fees, including for birth certificates, immunizations, and academic records
10. Parent and guardian education and training
11. Coordination between schools and service agencies
12. Specialized instructional support services
13. Needs related to domestic violence and parental mental health or substance abuse
14. Adaptation of space and purchase of supplies for certain non-school facilities
15. Provision of school supplies, including at shelters
16. Extraordinary or emergency assistance

As the Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSEP), established under H.B. 1682 (2016), was intended “to supplement federal McKinney-Vento Act dollars to ensure homeless students continue attending the same schools, maintain housing stability, and improve academic achievement,” and not supplant other funds, its allowable uses closely mirrored those of McKinney-Vento. Partnerships between school districts and housing-focused community-based organizations allowed for the following additional expenses: rental assistance, transportation assistance, emergency shelters, and housing stability case management.

HSSEP allowable uses were specified and broadened in 2023 under H.B. 1622 to include:

- direct academic supports, including tutoring and additional transportation costs;
- basic needs, including retail store cards, nutrition supports, and hygiene items;
- wraparound supports, including contracting with community-based providers; behavioral and physical health supports; and housing-related supports, such as bedding and short-term hotel or motel stays, that meet a student’s emergent needs and allow the student to fully participate in school;
- employment supports for students and families; and
- out-of-school enrichment activities, such as an academic tutor provided at a shelter.⁸⁷

Similarly, allowable uses of funds from the American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) program included the above McKinney-Vento spending categories, as well as certain expenses relating to hiring and retaining staff or contracting with community-based organizations, short-term housing, transportation to school of origin, training to identify students and connect with wraparound services, store cards for necessary materials for school participation, internet access, college applications and FAFSA, graduation supports, and early childhood education.⁸⁸

Endnotes

1. Education for Homeless Children and Youths, 42 U.S.C. § 119 VI, Part B (1987). <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
2. Espinoza, D., Griffith, M., Burns, D., & Shields, P. M. (2023). *Federal and state resources for students experiencing homelessness*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/546.264>
3. National Center for Homeless Education. (2026). *Education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States: Data summary for school years 2021–22 to 2023–24*. <https://nche.ed.gov/education-of-children-and-youth-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-united-states-data-summary-for-school-years-2021-22-to-2023-24/>
4. Bishop, J., Camargo Gonzalez, L., & Rivera, E. (2020). *State of crisis: Dismantling student homelessness in California*. Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California. <https://transformschoools.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/cts-state-of-crisis-executive-summary-3.pdf>; Hatchimonji, D. R., Herbers, J. E., Flatley, C. A., Treglia, D., & Cutuli, J. J. (2024). Student homelessness in high school: Prevalence, individual characteristics, and profiles of risk and multidomain functioning. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Sciences*, 106(3). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10443894231215522>
5. National Center for Homeless Education. (2024). *Student homelessness in America: School years 2020–21 to 2022–23*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/student-homelessness-america-school-years-2020-21-2022-23>; National Center for Homeless Education. (2026). *Education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States: Data summary for school years 2021–22 to 2023–24*. <https://nche.ed.gov/education-of-children-and-youth-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-united-states-data-summary-for-school-years-2021-22-to-2023-24/>. Note that national special education services eligibility estimates under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) among overall student population are from 2022–23, the most recent year available.
6. National Center for Homeless Education. (2026). *Education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States: Data summary for school years 2021–22 to 2023–24*. <https://nche.ed.gov/education-of-children-and-youth-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-united-states-data-summary-for-school-years-2021-22-to-2023-24/>
7. Burns, D., Espinoza, D., Ondrasek, N., & Yang, M. (2021). *Students experiencing homelessness: The conditions and outcomes of homelessness among California students*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/students-experiencing-homelessness-report>
8. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 119 § 11431 et seq. (1987). See <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
9. Center on the Developing Child. (2016). *From best practices to breakthrough impacts: A science-based approach to building a more promising future for young children and families*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/report/best-practices-breakthrough-impacts/>; Moore, J. (2013). *Resilience and at-risk children and youth*. National Center for Homeless Education. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/resilience.pdf>
10. Thistle-Elliott, L. (2014). *Supporting homeless children and youth through proactive and positive behavior management and intervention practices*. National Center for Homeless Education. <https://nche.ed.gov/research-summary-supporting-homeless-children-and-youth-through-proactive-and-positive-behavior-management-and-intervention-practices/>
11. Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel, S., Curry, S., & Carreon, E. (2019). *Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/ChapinHall_VoYC_Education-Brief.pdf
12. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 119 § 11434a (1987). *Definitions*. See <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>. The definition includes those who are living doubled up with other families due to economic hardship, in motels or hotels, in shelters, or who are unsheltered. While most students experiencing homelessness are with their families, around 8% are unaccompanied youth; i.e., not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. See also National Center for Homeless Education. (2026). *Education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in the United States: Data summary for school years 2021–22 to 2023–24*. <https://nche.ed.gov/education-of-children-and-youth-experiencing-homelessness-in-the-united-states-data-summary-for-school-years-2021-22-to-2023-24/>

13. Research finds that doubled-up homelessness can precede other forms of homelessness. Families experiencing homelessness can move between doubled-up and other homeless living arrangements as they grapple with the challenges of homelessness. Grant, R., Gracy, D., Goldsmith, G., Shapiro, A., & Redlener, I. E. (2013). Twenty-five years of child and family homelessness: Where are we now? *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(S2), e1–e10. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301618>; Richard, M. K., Dworkin, J., Rule, K. G., Farooqui, S., Glendening, Z., & Carlson, S. (2024). Quantifying doubled-up homelessness: Presenting a new measure using U.S. Census microdata. *Housing Policy Debate*, 34(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1981976>
14. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. 119 § 11431 et seq. (1987). See <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
15. Ed Data Express. McKinney-Vento Act 2022–23 EDFacts file specifications 118 [Dataset]. U.S. Department of Education. <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/dashboard/homeless/2022-2023?s=1035&sy=2955> (accessed 11/05/2025).
16. Espinoza, D., Griffith, M., Burns, D., & Shields, P. M. (2023). *Federal and state resources for students experiencing homelessness*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/546.264>
17. 20 U.S.C. Title 20, Chapter 70, Subchapter 1, Part A, Subpart 1 § 6313(c)(3)(C). *Reservation of funds: Homeless children and youths*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2024-title20/pdf/USCODE-2024-title20-chap70-subchapl-partA-subpart1-sec6313.pdf>
18. Espinoza, D., Griffith, M., Burns, D., & Shields, P. M. (2023). *Federal and state resources for students experiencing homelessness*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/546.264>
19. Maine Department of Education. *Preventing Student Homelessness Program: State pilot to help Maine students avoid homelessness*. <https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/counseling/highmobility/homelessed/statepilot>
20. Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. *Community Schools Rental Assistance Program*. <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/HomelessSolutions/pages/community-schools.aspx> (accessed 12/22/2025).
21. Espinoza, D., Griffith, M., Burns, D., & Shields, P. M. (2023). *Federal and state resources for students experiencing homelessness*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/546.264>
22. Washington State Legislature. (2014). Substitute S.B. 6074, 2014 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2013-14/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/6074-S.PL.pdf>
23. Washington State Legislature. (2015). Second Substitute S.B. 5404, 2015 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2015-16/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5404-S2.SL.pdf?cite=2015%20c%2069%20s%205>. See also Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 330 § 705. *Homeless youth—Office of homeless youth prevention and protection programs*. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.705>
24. Washington State Legislature. (2016). Third Substitute H.B. 1682, 2016 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2015-16/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1682-S3.PL.pdf>
25. Washington State Legislature. (2019). Substitute S.B. 5324, 2019 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5324-S.SL.pdf?cite=2019%20c%20412%20s%203>; Washington State Legislature. (2023). Substitute H.B. 1406, 2023 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1406-S.SL.pdf?q=20251030154201>; H.B. 1622 (2023) broadened allowable uses by amending § 2b of Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. Bill text can be found at Washington State Legislature (2023). H.B. 1622, 2023 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1622.SL.pdf?q=20251104171521>; Washington State Legislature (2026). Substitute H.B. 2594, 2026 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/2594-S.SL.pdf?q=20260401141506>
26. National Center for Homeless Education. (2018). *Local homeless education liaisons: Important information for new local liaisons* [Best Practices in Homeless Education Brief Series]; SchoolHouse Connection. *Guidelines for designating LEA-level and building-level McKinney-Vento liaisons*. <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/article/guidelines-for-designating-lea-level-and-building-level-mckinney-vento-liaisons> (accessed 11/03/2025).
27. Dhaliwal, T. K., Lenhoff, S. W., Singer, J., Erb-Downward, J., Miller, W., Burch, B., & Bertrand, A. (2026). Gaps in identification, support, and outcomes for students experiencing homelessness and housing instability. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2026.2615310>; Poverty Solutions. (2021). *The educational implications of homelessness and housing instability in Detroit*. University of Michigan. <https://poverty.umich.edu/2021/08/23/nearly-9-out-of-10-unhoused-detroit-students-not-identified-by-schools-u-m-analysis-finds/>

28. U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Education for Homeless Children and Youths program: Non-regulatory guidance Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act* (updated 2018). <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2020/07/160240ehcyguidanceupdated082718.pdf> (accessed 03/30/2026).
29. H.B. 1622 (2023) broadened allowable uses by amending § 2b of Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1622.SL.pdf?q=20251104171521>
30. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty & Columbia Legal Services. (2011). *Beds and buses: How affordable housing can help reduce school transportation costs*. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Beds_and_Buses.pdf
31. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty & Columbia Legal Services. (2011). *Beds and buses: How affordable housing can help reduce school transportation costs*. National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (p. 2). https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Beds_and_Buses.pdf
32. Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>
33. See, for example, Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report>
34. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 185C § 340. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.340>; Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant process to identify students and district capacity for support—Award criteria—Districts’ responsibilities—Report. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.300.542>
35. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 185C § 340. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.340>
36. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 185C § 340. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.340>
37. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 185C § 340. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.340>
38. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant process to identify students and district capacity for support—Award criteria—Districts’ responsibilities—Report. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.300.542>
39. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant process to identify students and district capacity for support—Award criteria—Districts’ responsibilities—Report. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.300.542>
40. Washington State Office of Financial Management. *OFM fund reference manual*. <https://ofm.wa.gov/accounting/fund-reference-manual/> (accessed 12/12/2025).
41. Rev. Code of Washington, Title 43, Chapter 185C § 340. Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.340>
42. The Washington legislature also has provided \$36,000 per year since 2016–17 to the state’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction for training and support of local school districts to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness.

43. HSSP grants in the initial years were made from OHY to school districts, who passed the grant money through to partnering housing organizations. Grants are now made from OHY directly to the housing organizations partnering with school districts. Due to this shift, the total number of unique grantees presented in the main text likely overestimates the number of unique housing organizations that have received grants, since a housing organization that was initially receiving pass-through funds from a district is counted separately from that district in the years when the housing organization received the grant directly.
44. State McKinney-Vento subgrants are determined by the proportion of students in poverty, using the same formula that calculates state Title I, Part A allocations. Over the 10-year period since the Homeless Student Stability programs were authorized in 2016, overall federal funds allocated for McKinney-Vento have increased from around \$70 million to just under \$130 million per year. Source for McKinney-Vento subgrant calculation formula: U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Education for Homeless Children and Youths program: Non-regulatory guidance Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act* (updated 2018). <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2020/07/160240ehcyguidanceupdated082718.pdf> (accessed 03/30/2026). Source for federal McKinney-Vento allocations by year: SchoolHouse Connection. (2026, February). *Congressional FY26 deal: Key wins for homeless children and youth*. <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/article/congressional-fy26-deal-key-wins-for-homeless-children-and-youth> (accessed 04/01/2026).
45. Given the composition of this sample, we do not present comparative data on what occurs in settings that did not receive HSSP or HSSEP funding.
46. See, for example, DiPierro, A., & Mitchell, C. (2022, November 15). *Hidden toll: Thousands of schools fail to count homeless students*. Center for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org/education/unhoused-and-undercounted/schools-fail-to-count-homeless-students/>; Hatchimonji, D. R., Flatley, C. A., Treglia, D., & Cutuli, J. (2021). *High school students experiencing homelessness: Findings from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)*. Nemours Children's Health System. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616088.pdf>
47. See Washington State Department of Commerce. *Youth homelessness prevention*. <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/ohy/ohy-strategic-initiatives/youth-homelessness-prevention/> (accessed 04/03/2026).
48. U.S. Department of Education. (2025, January 13). *OESE Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) outlay tracker*. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/arp-hcy-available-balances-state-january-2025-109254.pdf> (accessed 12/02/2025).
49. For examples of allowable uses of ARP-HCY funding, see SchoolHouse Connection. (2024). *Allowable and strategic uses of American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth*. <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/imported-files/Allowable-Uses-of-ARP-HCY-Funds-Quick-Reference-January-2024.pdf> (accessed 12/03/2025).
50. Our matching technique identified students experiencing homelessness with similar characteristics in districts with and without funding. Because districts that received funding were different than districts that did not receive any funding (by student- and school-level characteristics), we were not able to match at the district level. This means that there could still be district-level contributors—aside from the funding—to the effects we see in our models.
51. DiPierro, A., & Mitchell, C. (2022, November 15). *Hidden toll: Thousands of schools fail to count homeless students*. Center for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org/education/unhoused-and-undercounted/schools-fail-to-count-homeless-students/>; Hatchimonji, D. R., Flatley, C. A., Treglia, D., & Cutuli, J. (2021). *High school students experiencing homelessness: Findings from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)*. Nemours Children's Health System. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616088.pdf>
52. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Washington state report card*. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/> (accessed 12/04/2025).
53. Washington State Department of Commerce. (n.d.). *Washington state homeless system performance county report card [Datasets]*. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/comhau/viz/DRAFTWashingtonStateHomelessSystemPerformance_CountyReportCardSFY2019/CountyReportCard (accessed 11/20/2025); Washington State Department of Commerce. *Snapshot of homelessness reports*. <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/xonalo6msygtcjt0hr7ci7qjg8lug7rc/folder/233598122191> (accessed 11/20/2025).
54. Burns, D., Espinoza, D., Ondrasek, N., & Yang, M. (2021). *California's students experiencing homelessness: Conditions, outcomes, and policy considerations*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/students-experiencing-homelessness-report>; California State Auditor. (2019). *Youth experiencing homelessness: California's education system for K–12 inadequately identifies and supports these youth*. <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2019-104.pdf>

55. See, for example, Burt, M. (2001). *What will it take to end homelessness?* Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/61346/310305-what-will-it-take-to-end-homelessness-.pdf>; California State Auditor. (2019). *Youth experiencing homelessness: California's education system for K–12 inadequately identifies and supports these youth*. <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2019-104.pdf>
56. Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).
57. Mawhinney-Rhoads, L., & Stahler, G. (2006). Educational policy and reform for homeless students: An overview. *Education and Urban Society*, 38(3), 288–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124506286943>
58. Burns, D., Espinoza, D., Ondrasek, N., & Yang, M. (2021). *California's students experiencing homelessness: Conditions, outcomes, and policy considerations*. Learning Policy Institute; Rumberger, R. W. (2015). *Student mobility: Causes, consequences, and solutions*. National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/student-mobility> (accessed 03/11/2022).
59. This definition and method of calculating school mobility differs from that used in a 2019 report by the state auditor, which counted only those school moves taking place within the same school district. For further details, see Washington State Auditor's Office. (2019). *Opportunities to better identify and serve K–12 students experiencing homelessness*. <https://information.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2019-104.pdf>
60. Data limitations do not permit analysis of whether students in families who increased their housing stability also increased their school stability. State agencies may wish to investigate this question in future.
61. Building Changes. (2025). *Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) policy brief*. <https://buildingchanges.org/resources/homeless-student-stability-program-2025-policy-brief/> (accessed 12/22/2025).
62. Kirksey, J. (2025). *Everyone is missing more school: How student attendance patterns have shifted over time*. American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/everyone-is-missing-more-school-how-student-attendance-patterns-have-shifted-over-time/>; Malkus, N. (2025). *Lingering absence in public schools: Tracking post-pandemic chronic absenteeism into 2024*. American Enterprise Institute. <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/lingering-absence-in-public-schools-tracking-post-pandemic-chronic-absenteeism-into-2024/>
63. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Washington State Report Card*. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/> (accessed 11/15/2025).
64. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Report card SQSS, 2015–16 to 2023–24 [Dataset]*. <https://data.wa.gov/browse?category=Education&sortBy=relevance&utf8=%E2%9C%93&provenance=official&pageSize=20&limitTo=datasets&q=report+card> (accessed 11/15/2025).
65. Erb-Downward, J., & Blakeslee, M. (2021). *Recognizing trauma: Why school discipline reform needs to consider student homelessness*. Poverty Solutions, University of Michigan. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614739.pdf> (accessed 11/20/2025); Thistle-Elliott, L. (2014). *Supporting homeless children and youth through proactive and positive behavior management and intervention practices*. National Center for Homeless Education. <https://nche.ed.gov/research-summary-supporting-homeless-children-and-youth-through-proactive-and-positive-behavior-management-and-intervention-practices/>
66. Klevan, S. (2021). *Building a positive school climate through restorative practices* [Research brief]. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/178.861>
67. Cribb Fabersunne, C., Lee, S. Y., McBride, D., Zahir, A., Gallegos-Castillo, A., LeWinn, K. Z., & Morris, M. D. (2023). Exclusionary school discipline and school achievement for middle and high school students, by race and ethnicity. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(10), e2338989. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.38989>; LiCalsi, C., Osher, D., & Bailey, P. (2021). An empirical examination of the effects of suspension and suspension severity on behavioral and academic outcomes. *American Institutes for Research*, 8. <https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/cmhn/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/NYC-Suspension-Effects-Behavioral-Academic-Outcomes-August-2021.pdf>
68. Darling-Hammond, S. (2023). *Fostering belonging, transforming schools: The impact of restorative practices*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/169.703>; Huang, F. L., Gregory, A., & Ward-Seidel, A. R. (2023). The impact of restorative practices on the use of out-of-school suspensions: Results from a cluster randomized controlled trial. *Prevention Science*, 24(5), 962–973. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-023-01507-3>
69. Kull, M. A., Morton, M. H., Patel, S., Curry, S., & Carreon, E. (2019). *Missed opportunities: Education among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in America*. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/ChapinHall_VoYC_Education-Brief.pdf

70. Given challenges in identifying the correct cohort using the administrative dataset provided by OSPI, which is necessary to calculate graduation rates, we focus here on the state-reported data.
71. While 4-year graduation rates are more commonly reported, given that highly mobile students such as students experiencing homelessness may experience more absences and need additional time to accumulate credits, 5-year graduation rates provide an important additional measure.
72. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Washington state report card*. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/> (accessed 12/16/2025).
73. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. *Graduation pathways*. <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/graduation/graduation-pathways> (accessed 11/21/2025); Washington State Board of Education. *Graduation requirements*. <https://sbe.wa.gov/our-work/graduation-requirements> (accessed 11/21/2025).
74. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026). *Ninth grade success: Helping students start high school on track*. <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2026-02/ninth-grade-success-one-pager.pdf> (accessed 03/04/2026).
75. Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. (2005). *The on-track indicator as a predictor of high school graduation*. Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/track-indicator-predictor-high-school-graduation>; Legters, N., & Andersen, K. (2018). *Ninth-grade on track system improvement guide: For building and district leaders*. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/ninthgradeontrack.pdf> (accessed 12/22/2025).
76. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2024). *Update: Building Bridges: Dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED673666.pdf> (accessed 11/30/2025).
77. Germain, E., Hernández, L. E., Klevan, S., Levine, R., & Maier, A. (2024). *Reducing chronic absenteeism: Lessons from community schools*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/510.597>; SchoolHouse Connection & Attendance Works. (2025). *Ten key strategies to improve attendance for students experiencing homelessness*. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZUOYKLHX93R11fwbFXpcZmUSua_AjOeyYTx6nvcPntA/edit?tab=t.0; Thistle-Elliott, L. (2014). *Supporting homeless children and youth through proactive and positive behavior management and intervention practices*. National Center for Homeless Education. <https://nche.ed.gov/research-summary-supporting-homeless-children-and-youth-through-proactive-and-positive-behavior-management-and-intervention-practices/>
78. Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).
79. Learning Policy Institute analysis of an administrative dataset provided by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2026).
80. Office of the Washington State Auditor. (2019). *Opportunities to better identify and serve K–12 students experiencing homelessness*. https://sao.wa.gov/sites/default/files/audit_reports/PA_Better_Supporting_K-12_Homeless_Students-ar1023748.pdf
81. Calculation is based on 2018–19 numbers to align with the timing of the state auditor’s report.
82. Source: Personal communication with staff at SchoolHouse Connection. (2026, January 25).
83. For example, see the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (<https://oklahoma.gov/occy.html>). The OCCY has a Homeless Children and Youth Steering Committee (<https://oklahoma.gov/occy/departments/planning-and-coordination/p-c-homeless-children-and-youth/homeless-children-and-youth-steering-committee.html>) that includes McKinney-Vento liaisons and has helped to advance issues they raise.
84. School districts nationwide are required to set aside funds under Title I, Part A for students experiencing homelessness based on a needs assessment, although the law doesn’t specify a set amount. For practical guidance, see Part 3 of SchoolHouse Connection. (2025). *Maximizing the Title I set-aside for homeless students: An actionable guide for practitioners, leaders, and advocates*. <https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/schoolhouse/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Maximizing-the-Title-I-Set-Aside-for-Homeless-Students.pdf>
85. SchoolHouse Connection. (2025). *Maximizing the Title I set-aside for homeless students: An actionable guide for practitioners, leaders, and advocates*. <https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/schoolhouse/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Maximizing-the-Title-I-Set-Aside-for-Homeless-Students.pdf>
86. National Center for Homeless Education. *McKinney-Vento subgrant authorized activities*. <https://nche.ed.gov/mv-auth-activities/> (accessed 03/06/2026).

87. H.B. 1622 (2023) broadened allowable uses by amending § 2b of Rev. Code of Washington, Title 28A, Chapter 300 § 542. Bill text can be found at Washington State Legislature. (2023). H.B. 1622, 2023 Reg. sess. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1622.SL.pdf?q=20251104171521>
88. SchoolHouse Connection. *Allowable and strategic uses of ARP-HCY funds*. <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/article/allowable-and-strategic-uses-of-american-rescue-plan-homeless-children-and-youth-arp-hcy-funds> (accessed 03/06/2026); U.S. Department of Education. (2023, September 12). *Dear colleague letter on ARP-HCY funding*. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/2023/09/ARP-HCY-DCL-9.12.2023.pdf> (accessed 03/06/2026).

About the Authors

Dion Burns is a Senior Researcher at the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), where he conducts qualitative and quantitative research on issues of educational equity. He is a co-author of the LPI reports *Students Experiencing Homelessness: The Conditions and Outcomes of Homelessness Among California Students* and *Closing the Opportunity Gap: How Positive Outlier Districts in California Are Pursuing Equitable Access to Deeper Learning* and a co-author of the book *Empowered Educators: How High-Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World*. He has more than 20 years of experience serving in a variety of roles in education, including research, teaching, and policy analysis. Burns earned an MA from Stanford University in International Comparative Education and a Master of International Relations from Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand).

Jennifer A. Bland is a Senior Researcher at LPI. In addition to her work on students experiencing homelessness, she has led or co-led LPI studies on teacher development and the teacher labor market in Texas; on the intersection between climate change and students, schools, and school systems; and on COVID-19 school health and safety. With over nearly 20 years in education research, her work has largely focused on policies and programs aiming to improve outcomes for students from historically marginalized populations. Before joining LPI, Bland worked as an education researcher at SRI International's Center for Education Policy and subsequently as an independent consultant. Bland received an MA in Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies from the Stanford Graduate School of Education and a BA in Political Science (with distinction) from Stanford University.

Jonathan Kaplan is a Senior Policy Advisor and Researcher at LPI. His work focuses on school funding and policy issues in California as well as research and policies to support multilingual learners. He has more than 15 years of experience in education policy, authoring various studies on California's K–12 education finance system, how state and federal policies impact public K–12 and postsecondary education, and how California's K–12 school funding compares to that in other states. Earlier in his career, Kaplan taught history and law for nearly a decade in California public high schools, where he supported the development of biliteracy for multilingual learners. Kaplan earned an MA in Education from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a BA in History from Yale University.

Patrick M. Shields is the former Executive Director and a current Senior Fellow of LPI. Shields is a co-author of the LPI reports *Federal and State Resources for Students Experiencing Homelessness* and *The Road to High-Quality Early Learning: Lessons From the States*. He also works on educator quality and co-authored LPI's report *Addressing California's Emerging Teacher Shortage*. Shields has more than 25 years of experience managing large-scale social science research projects. Prior to joining LPI, he was the Executive Director of SRI Education, where he also served as Research Director for Teaching and California's Future, a 15-year initiative to track the quality of the teacher workforce, which contributed to legislation to ensure high-quality teaching for all of California's students. Shields has also overseen many foundation-supported studies of STEM opportunities for disadvantaged children, including serving as the co-principal investigator of the Science Activation Lab, a national research and design effort to dramatically strengthen learning.



learningpolicyinstitute.org

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.