

FAQ: Homeless Student Liaisons



Who are homeless student liaisons?

They play a crucial part in ensuring students experiencing homelessness are identified in their school buildings and get connected to the services and supports they need. They may also be known as **McKinney-Vento liaisons, building points of contact, family support staff, homeless student stability program staff, family liaisons, student navigators, school counselors, school social workers**, and more.



What do homeless student liaisons do?

- Identify students experiencing homelessness
- Connect families with before and after school care
- Provide referrals to physical, behavioral, and dental health providers
- Identify strategies to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness
- Conduct outreach to communities and partners
- Connect students and families to education and housing resources
- Connect students with school supplies, clothing, food, and hygiene supplies
- Inform parents/guardians on rights and resources
- Connect community programs and state agencies
- Arrange transportation for students experiencing homelessness



Why are homeless student liaisons so important?

Homeless student liaisons play a vital role in schools and communities. They are trained in homelessness services and supports and are often the first people to identify a student is experiencing homelessness. They also have **expertise and contacts** within communities to connect students and families with resources to meet their diverse and unique needs. Many homeless student liaisons have other **unique skill sets**, such as being multilingual and having lived experience, as well as serving the roles of school counselor, nurse, or foster care liaison.

How are homeless student liaisons funded?

Homeless student liaisons are funded from a variety of funding sources. Exact distributions **vary by school district**. Unfortunately, **schools and school districts receive nowhere near the funding needed to identify and serve all the students and families in their area**.

Funding is also often time-restricted, can come with limitations on how it can be used, is dependent on uncertain or fluctuating funding streams, and can be overly burdensome to apply for. Here are some examples of funding sources for homeless student liaisons:

Local

- **Levies:** Local levies are voted on by communities and must be passed to support schools. Levy amounts vary by district.

State

- **Basic Education:** Funding to fulfill the state's paramount duty to provide a K-12 education to every child in WA. Funding is provided for certain staff, such as counselors and student health providers.
- **Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP):** Statewide competitive grant program distributed to school districts and nonprofit organizations to support students experiencing homelessness. Less than 6% of WA school districts were funded in the most recent round of OSPI funding for HSSP.

Federal

- **McKinney-Vento (MKV) Program:** Federal grant program for states that provides limited funding to school districts for students experiencing homelessness. Only 9% of WA school districts were funded in the most recent allocation of MKV funding. This funding often does not meet the full need of school district grantees.
- **Title I, Part A:** Federal funding awarded to school districts with high rates of children in families with low incomes. Complements the MKV program.
- **American Rescue Plan - Homeless Children & Youth (ARP-HCY):** Federal pandemic dollars to help identify students experiencing homelessness, provide wrap-around services, and enable full participation in school activities. These one-time funds must be spent by Jan 2025. Less than 6% of WA school districts received ARP-HCY dollars.

Private

- **Grants or donations** from foundations, corporations, or nonprofits



How many students in WA experience homelessness?

More than 30,000 students were identified as experiencing homelessness in Washington's K-12 public schools during the 2022-23 school year, according to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Homelessness doesn't just occur in urban school districts, but is also very prevalent in **rural districts**, too. Recent data also show that students experiencing homelessness are **disproportionately students of color**. Find out more about the student homelessness numbers in your community [here](#).

What can you do to support homeless student liaisons and ensure they have continued funding?

- Reach out to your [school district's homeless student liaison](#) and see what they need.
- Learn more about student homelessness in your school district and community through [Building Changes' data dashboard](#) and share with your community.
- Contact your school/school district and share how important homeless student liaisons are to you.
- Attend your school board meetings and ensure homeless student liaisons are fully funded in school budgets.
- [Contact your legislators](#) and ask them to support and fully fund homeless student programs, such as the [Homeless Student Stability Program \(HSSP\)](#).

What is a program unique to Washington State that's helping students experiencing homelessness and supporting liaisons?

The Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) started in 2016 and is a grant program administered by OSPI and the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY), and supported by Building Changes. Many of the grants are given to school districts to increase the number of homeless student liaisons. HSSP is the **first of its kind in the nation**, bridging education and housing systems, while adding state dollars to support federal and local student homelessness dollars.

During the 2023 legislative session, Building Changes led advocacy to secure an additional \$4.6 million for HSSP, **increasing its total funding to \$9 million**.

