



Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Webinar Transcription: February 27, 2018

Nyla Bell:

Welcome everyone. Our presenters for today are: Jennifer Pringle, Project Director, New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, based in New York City; and April Anderson, McKinney-Vento District Liaison of the Red Clay Consolidated School District, in Wilmington, Delaware. The title for today's webinar topic is: Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). We will discuss students' rights under ESSA, and how to support them.

Today's webinar is being hosted by the Center for Education Equity (CEE), a project of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC), in partnership with WestEd and the American Institutes for Research. CEE is one of four regional Equity Assistance Centers funded by the US Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and serves 15 states and territories in Region One.

Our Equity Assistance Center serves the Northeast Region One covering south of Maryland to the tip of Maine. Our goals are to improve and sustain the systemic capacity of public education systems to address problems caused by segregation and inequities. We also seek to increase equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of race, gender, religion, and national origin — including English learners.

CEE serves to provide technical assistance and training to states, districts, schools, and community-based organizations in Region One at the request of school boards and other responsible governmental agencies.

Today, our presenters will: (1) provide an overview of the problems of homelessness; (2) discuss the laws and policies that address homelessness; (3) discuss the laws that address how schools should support students experiencing homelessness —including and especially — the most recent changes to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); (4) discuss the challenges students face when trying to navigate the school system while homeless; and (5) provide educators and school administrators advice, tools, and/or strategies to support students who are experiencing homelessness.

Today, we ask all of our audience members to: (1) use a Q&A box if you have any questions; (2)

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

use the comment box to share your comments or to engage other participants during the webinar; and (3) complete a brief survey after the webinar. We are pleased to offer closed captioning services which can be accessed using the link and event ID number listed below and posted in the chat box. At this time, I would like to pass the presentation over to our first presenter, Jennifer Pringle.

Jennifer Pringle:

Thank you. I am happy to be presenting this afternoon. My name is Jennifer Pringle and I am the Director of the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students, known as NYS-TEACHS. We are funded by the New York State Education Department and housed at a nonprofit in New York City. We are funded to provide technical assistance on homeless education issues, mostly to school districts, social service providers, parents, and youth.

We do that through answering questions through a hotline as well as offering on-site and online training. We also have a website listed on the power point slide that has a wealth of information on homeless education issues.

A little bit about me. I first started this type of work at a shelter in Brooklyn where I did case management and advocacy on behalf of parents. That work primarily involved special education issues parents were confronting as well as training for shelter-based staff and working with parents around the intersection of education and how their kids' education would be impacted by the family's lack of housing.

Through that work, I started doing district level work that grew into some state policy work. Now, I am directing the technical assistance center throughout the State. One thing that is really great about some of the issues we will touch on today is the growing support available for children expressing homelessness. I have been doing this work for 15+ years and the support and protections available to students have only gotten stronger over time.

I think one thing, though, that is troubling is the rise in the number of children experiencing homelessness. That is something that has grown significantly over the years.

Before we jump into the contents, it would be great to find out from you how familiar you are with the McKinney-Vento Act. Please enter your response by clicking on the panel and hitting "Submit" on the right-hand side of the screen.

[Group is being polled.]

Okay, the poll has ended. Can you show the results? It looks like we have a good mix. We have new and experienced folks on the line. We will offer information on the basics as well as recent updates for those who are well familiar with the McKinney-Vento Act. Before we get started I want to include a quotation from a report called "Hidden in Plain Sight". There is link to the full report on the power point slide. This is from a young person who was interviewed as part of a report. For those who are familiar with McKinney-Vento, for many young people, schools are the *de facto* social service provider. Teachers, coaches, and school building staff are the folks who are the ones, the cheerleaders, for so many children giving the support they need to get through an incredibly difficult time.

Here is some background information about the prevalence of homelessness. These are numbers from the National Center for Homeless Education. In 2015-2016, there were over 1.3

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

million students identified as homeless in public schools, nationwide. To put that in perspective, that's roughly the same size as the entire population of Dallas, Texas. So we have a full city of young people experiencing homelessness. It's pretty startling. And scary.

The pie chart on the right, that is the type of temporary housing arrangement that students who are homeless have been identified as living in. There are four main categories the federal government tracks:

- (1) A temporary doubled-up situation, which makes up about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the number of students identified as homeless.
- (2) Those living in shelters and transitional housing.
- (3) Those living in hotels, motels.
- (4) Unsheltered, i.e., young people living on the street, in abandoned buildings, or in parks and campgrounds.

What are the potential causes of homelessness?

Some of the most common examples are low wages, poverty, unemployment, and lack of affordable housing.

With regard to the issue of lack of affordable housing, in 2002 the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) looked at renters who were classified as extremely low-income. HUD found that there are over 10.3 million renters who fall in this category, but there are only 5.8 million rental units that would have been affordable to those families. So there is a gross imbalance between the incomes of families and availability of affordable housing in the U.S.

Another thing that's very important is the impact of racism and homelessness. Individuals and families who are minorities make up a disproportionate percentage of those in shelters. This is not surprising given this country's history of housing discrimination and employment discrimination. One thing to note, there was a survey done by the Homeless Youth Project that found that African-American youth were less likely to identify themselves as homeless whereas white youth were much more likely to self identify and access services for students experiencing homelessness. I think in terms of those who are working in schools making sure they understand the intersection between racism and homelessness is so important and how that may play out in terms of which families of students are self identifying and accessing needed support within schools.

Another thing to point out is that youth identifying as LGBTQ are disproportionately represented among homeless unaccompanied youth. These are youth not living with their parents, perhaps because they were rejected by their family and kicked out of their home.

Another thing to keep in mind is that many students who identify as LGBTQ also have higher incidence of reporting assaults and harassment in schools. School may not be a safe place for many of them. That's why making that connection with supportive adults in school is so critical to their continued attendance and graduation.

With that in mind, let's turn over to the McKinney-Vento Act and talk about some supports

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

available for students experiencing homelessness.

For those of you new to the Act, it's a federal law first enacted in 1987 and reauthorized in 2015 as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It's listed on the slide, where you can see the citations to the Act in the federal code. There are three main themes in the McKinney-Vento Act. First, there's a strong emphasis on school stability by making sure students experiencing homelessness can stay connected to schools, teachers, school staff, and friends, even though their life outside school may be unstable.

Second, is making sure that a student who transfers to a different school has immediate access to school even if they lack the required documents.

Third, making sure there are supports in place so they can be successful in school. We will talk about each of those in more detail.

We want to come back to school stability. One thing important to note because so many young people experiencing homelessness transfer schools, the research has consistently shown that students who frequently change schools have poor academic outcomes. Also, there are poor social and emotional outcomes because every school transfer involves making new friends, losing their support system, and trying to establish themselves in the community. So, again, a big emphasis in McKinney-Vento is school stability.

We have another poll. A student cannot be identified as homeless under McKinney-Vento Act if they are staying at a private residence, true or false?

[Group is being polled.]

I will give a spoiler. The answer is false. Most of you got that correct. The reason is that the McKinney-Vento Act defines homelessness quite broadly. As I shared with you before, one of the most common type of living situation is the temporary doubled-up situation. The Act defines those as sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, other economic hardship, or other similar reasons. One of the reasons McKinney-Vento defines homelessness so broadly is that in many communities, there simply aren't shelters available. So, if a family of a student loses their home, they are oftentimes temporarily staying with someone else. This is not referring to long-term, stable, multigenerational households. We are talking about someone who has lost their housing and who is temporarily staying with someone else until they can find permanent housing.

The overarching definitions under the Act are children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Examples are the temporary, doubled-up living situation, emergency or transitional shelters, living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, campgrounds, etc., due to the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations.

So, if I decide I want to renovate my kitchen and I will temporarily stay in a hotel, that does not make me homeless. It has to be due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations. Or, just because I'm living in a trailer park does not mean I am homeless.

One thing I want to point out is that children and youth in foster care are not covered under McKinney-Vento Act. There used to be provision that included children and youth waiting for foster care placement. That was taken out in December 2016. Now there's a separate provision

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

in the law that requires school districts and local child welfare agencies to work together to ensure students in foster care can stay connected with their same school. So there are similar provisions for children in care but kids in foster care are not protected under McKinney-Vento. It's two separate laws now.

In some states, there was some overlap. But with the changes that went into effect under ESSA in 2016 that's now separated.

After we have gone through the eligibility, we will stop for a second and take questions.

On the right-hand side you will see a Q&A window. If you have any questions about eligibility or any examples I just shared, type them into the box and we can answer them for you.

If we don't get any, we will move right along.

If you have additional questions that occur to you, type them in as I keep going and we can come back to them as well.

I think we can keep going.

Next I want to touch on "unaccompanied youth". These are also protected by the McKinney-Vento Act. They are defined as youth whose temporary housing situation meets the definition of homeless under McKinney-Vento AND who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. It doesn't matter who has legal custody. It's that they're not physically living with a parent or legal guardian. If they meet the definition of homeless and they're not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian, they would qualify as an unaccompanied youth under McKinney-Vento. Unaccompanied youth have the right to enroll in school even if they don't have a parent or legal guardian with them. They should work with the McKinney-Vento Liaison in deciding whether or not they want to stay in their same school or transfer to a local school. The Liaison has to take that young person's wishes into account in making a decision. Some school districts use caregiver authorization forms to get information about the adult with whom the young person is staying. Although we consider that a "best practice" that the school knows the adult with whom the student is staying, if the young person is unable to provide that information, that's not a requirement. They don't have to provide that information.

One thing I want to point out, is that school is the safest place for most young people to be. Oftentimes, schools are very uncomfortable with enrolling a young person who is on her own. They want the parents, they want to see their legal guardian before processing. We say to schools, make sure that young person is in school where they are getting an education and the support they need and the school is making those referrals and connections so that the young person has a stable place to live. Keeping them out of school is the worst. It is illegal under McKinney-Vento and it also could put that young person in a dangerous position.

Some identification challenges. Again, this is from the Hidden in Plain Sight Report, and is a quotation from a young person and a local Liaison. I want to include these because these are very real situations. There's a lot of stigma attached to the word homeless. A lot of young people and parents don't want to identify as living in a homeless situation. They don't want their child labeled as being homeless. They will hide that. They will not be forthcoming which is completely understandable. One of the things we want to stress is school districts have an affirmative obligation to identify students experiencing homelessness because we know the

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

educational outcomes of kids experiencing homelessness are significantly worsened not only district-wide averages but also in terms of students who qualify as low income. That's because they're living in a homeless situation that poses additional challenges that impact a child's education.

Without identifying them, school districts aren't able to target resources. If school districts can identify students who may be experiencing homelessness, they can give provide additional support to help them be successful in school.

Here are some strategies about addressing some common identification challenges. We recommend not using the word homeless because of the stigma. Instead using language like students in temporary housing or in transition or those eligible for McKinney-Vento Act services. We recommend that in approaching these conversations with parents, school districts be up front about why they are asking for sensitive information about the families' living arrangements. The school district has an obligation to identify students in certain types of temporary living situations and students who are eligible for additional services so the school is asking questions to see if a student may qualify for services.

Also make sure these conversations are held in a private location so that other parents and other staff cannot hear, because of the sensitivity of the information. Being transparent about how the information will be shared, who will know about this information. No one wants his business being shared with everyone in the school building. Telling the parents we would like to share the information with your child's teacher so your child's teacher can keep an extra eye out and connect with your student and give extra support in the classroom.

Also, providing training to school staff about the McKinney-Vento Act, including the need to be sensitive and how to handle this information and maintain confidentiality as much as possible.

We require training for folks like registrars, secretaries, counselors, bus drivers, tutors, security officers, etc.

We also recommend school districts have a uniform housing questionnaire. A lot of states have this standard housing questionnaire that all students enrolled in the school district have to fill out or any time they seek a change of address. So you are not singling out certain students asking about housing situations, all families are asked about it.

Posting outreach materials, making sure there are posters up at school and places where other families experiencing homelessness may frequent. Coordination is key in getting the word out. So other agencies can tell parents about McKinney-Vento Act and what legal protections are available for kids in temporary housing arrangements.

I want to give a plug for the National Center for Homeless Education's Determining Eligibility issue brief.

It is a great document with sample questions that can help you figure out whether or not a student may be protected under McKinney-Vento.

What are the core services under McKinney-Vento? Listed on the slide are the big ones. Transportation to school of origin. You lost your housing, you are temporarily residing someplace else, you want your child to stay in the same school and the district has to provide

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

transportation back to that same school.

Ultimately, if you lost your housing, it is too far to commute back and forth, and you decide you want the student to enroll locally, the student is entitled to immediate enrollment even if they don't have the documents normally needed. All students who are McKinney-Vento eligible are entitled to Title I services. All school districts have to set aside a portion of their Title I services specifically for students in temporary housing, called the Title I set-aside. Typically, this fund is to support the emergency needs of kids experiencing homelessness.

Every single school district in the country has to designate a McKinney-Vento Act Liaison. This includes all school districts, charter schools, if you have regional education centers. Each one of those entities are called local education agencies, and each has to have a designated Liaison. States are now required to host contact information for all the Liaisons in the State. If you looking for contact information, I encourage you to go to your State education agency website and you should be able to look up the Liaison information.

All students who are McKinney-Vento-eligible are categorically eligible for free meals.

A note about school selection. As I mentioned before, a student can stay in the school of origin or immediately enroll in a local school. This is done by a best interest determination with the presumption that staying in the same school (the school of origin) is in the best interest of the student unless the parent or guardian wishes for the student to transfer. What is the school of origin? There are two definitions: (1) the school attended when last permanently housed; or (2) the school most recently attended. In the vast majority of cases, those two options are the same. If you have student who is highly mobile, moves around quite a bit, you could possibly have two schools of origin.

Another change as a result of ESSA is that the school of origin now includes preschool. If you have a public preschool program in your district where a student is enrolled and they lose their housing, they can maintain enrollment in that public preschool program even though they may be living in a different district and they can get transportation back to that preschool.

Transportation is required to the school of origin even if it's not offered to permanently house students living close to where the temporary housing situation is. There are some places where you may have a walking district where they don't offer busing to permanently-housed kids, but it would still have to offer busing to the school of origin for a student in temporary housing.

With regard to that, if the student transfers schools, she is entitled to immediate — meaning— same day enrollment in the local school even if they don't have the papers normally needed, such as a birth certificate or proof of immunization or academic records. They are entitled to immediate enrollment and it is the enrolling school's responsibility to submit a records request from the previous school attended to get those records.

A bit about the McKinney-Vento Act Liaison. Listed on the next two slides are the responsibilities of the Liaison and in bold are the changes as a result of ESSA. So, if you're looking for recent changes, those are the ones in bold.

There are 10 responsibilities. As you can see, a lot of it has to do with outreach identification, enrollment, there's a stronger emphasis on connecting young children experiencing homelessness with early care and education, services such as early head start, early

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

intervention. Then continued here, Liaisons have an obligation to make those referrals. That has been extended to substance abuse services as well as housing. Number 6 has to do with obligation of public notice about the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness. One thing to point out is that the National Center for Homeless Education has free posters available. If you are from a school district you can order those free of cost to put up in your school building. If you have shelters, public libraries, food pantries, those are all good places to put up those notices.

On this next slide you can see Liaisons are responsible for mediating any disputes that may come up. Typically those arise because there's a disagreement about whether or not a student may be covered as homeless or a disagreement about school selection, should they stay in the school of origin or transfer.

Eight has to do with making sure the young person is connected with transportation services. Nine is a new one that just went into effect as a result of ESSA. Liaisons are now responsible for providing professional development and support to school district staff who work with students in temporary housing.

Finally, under number 10, Liaisons are responsible for making sure homeless unaccompanied youth know they can apply for federal financial aid as an independent student. They are responsible for providing verification of the students an independent student status. That is a big change. It's new Liaison responsibility that just went into effect as a result of ESSA. They are also responsible for making sure youth experiencing homelessness receive full or partial credit for any coursework successfully completed in another district.

A lot of responsibilities there. One thing important to note for those who may be unfamiliar with Liaison role, it's not a standalone position. It is an additional responsibility given to someone who already has a full time job. School districts do not get additional funding to carry out McKinney-Vento Act responsibilities. In a lot of districts we see, it's someone like the school social worker, guidance counselor, or registrar who is the Liaison.

On this slide you will see some changes to McKinney-Vento as a result of ESSA. Most of these I have already addressed. A few that I haven't I want to highlight. With regard to number 6, expansion of privacy protection, school districts cannot release information about the address or homeless status of a student without parental consent. That's a new one. Another expansion I haven't touched on previously is number 9. As I mentioned, transportation is required to the school of origin while the student is in temporary housing. As a result of the changes under ESSA, transportation is now required for the remainder of the school year in which the student becomes permanently housed.

Those are some of the larger changes that have come about as result of ESSA.

Also, in Title I, all school districts that receive Title I funding have to set aside a portion of that funding for students who are homeless. That includes districts as well as charter schools. They have to do that set-aside. If you don't know what that set-aside is in your district, I would contact your Liaison or your coordinator to find out what that amount is and what types of services that can be used for.

Some of the key takeaways here before we break for questions again. School stability is such a key factor to helping young children or youth experiencing homelessness. Helping them build

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

that resilience in the face of those challenges they have outside school. The definition of homeless under McKinney-Vento is students who lack housing that is fixed, regular, and adequate. Unaccompanied youth are protected under McKinney-Vento. Those are students who meet the definition of homelessness and are not in physical custody of a parent. Students who are in temporary housing are entitled to immediate enrollment if they transfer. Students who are homeless are entitled to transportation to the school of origin including preschool for the whole time they're in temporary housing and through the remainder of the school year in which they become permanently housed.

Students in temporary housing are categorically eligible for free meals and Title I services.

Listed on this slide are some resources. The first is a link to the McKinney-Vento Act. Also, the second link is the non-regulatory guidance the Department of Education put out addressing the ESSA changes. It's a great resource if you want to take a deeper dive into those changes and how they are being implemented.

In addition to the requirement that every school district and every local educational agency has a McKinney-Vento Liaison, there are also McKinney-Vento Act state coordinators. If you want to get in touch with your state coordinator, find out what's going on at a state level, you should visit the National Center for Homeless Education's website.

Other resources, including issue briefs and strategies for implementation and connection, are available at SchoolHouse Connection.org.

With that, we will take another break for questions.

Nyla Bell:

If you have questions, please take a moment and let us know. There's a question from J. Leon that asks are students displaced by emergency situations covered by the McKinney-Vento Act?

Jennifer Pringle:

The U.S. Department of Education has made it clear that McKinney-Vento Act determinations must be made on a case-by-case basis. That said, after an emergency such as a natural disaster where you have displaced students, the overwhelming majority of such students will be covered initially.

Could there be a situation where a family lost their housing and immediately moved into another permanent housing situation? Yes. In which case, they were displaced but they found permanent housing immediately. There was no period of homelessness. But, in the overwhelming majority of situations, there's a period of homelessness after displacement qualifying the students for protection under McKinney-Vento.

Nyla Bell:

Thank you. We have another question from Susan. She asks: Who signs IEPs for unaccompanied youth with special education needs?

Jennifer Pringle:

That is a great question. You would have to look at your state regulations in terms of the definition of parent. Some define it broadly. Here in New York State, a person in parental relation can —meets — the definition of a parent and can sign for consent for evaluation for IEP on behalf of an unaccompanied homeless youth.

But, if there isn't an adult who meets the definition in your state, the district is obligated to

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

appoint a surrogate parent and the surrogate parent would then sign the IEP form.

Every school district is required to have a list of surrogate parents. They must expeditiously appoint a surrogate parent if one is not available.

The federal regulations allow for a temporary surrogate parent to consent for evaluation. Let's say you have a young person who is living in a runaway and homeless youth shelter. Typically, the caseworker who is responsible for the care of the young person cannot serve as a surrogate parent. However, the federal regs allow for staff from shelters to serve as temporary surrogate parents until a more permanent surrogate can be provided.

- Nyla Bell: OK. We have another question, from Julian. The McKinney-Vento law seems to be segregating the definition of what or who is homeless. Should this dissection be helping students?
- Jennifer Pringle: It seems to be what?
- Nyla Bell: It seems to be segregating the definition of what or who is homeless.
- Jennifer Pringle: Unfortunately, I'm not sure I follow what the question is.
- Nyla Bell: Julian, if you're there, please restate your question if you're able to do that so we can try to answer that question for you.
- We have another question from ____?? Ramos. Is there an estimated percentage of homeless students who happen to be unaccompanied minors?
- Jennifer Pringle: If the question is how many students are unaccompanied homeless, approximately 9% of the students identified as homeless are also identified as homeless unaccompanied youth.
- If that's ... oftentimes when people refer to unaccompanied minors, sometimes they refer to unaccompanied immigrant minors, those young people who have entered the U.S. without a parent or legal guardian. That is not tracked by the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Nyla Bell: Thank you. We have another question from Michelle. Does the law apply the same if they are undocumented students?
- Jennifer Pringle: Yes, it absolutely does. The status of a student does not matter. Documented or undocumented, McKinney-Vento applies the same.
- Nyla Bell: Thank you. We have another question. Forgive me if I mispronounce anyone's name. Henrit?? Taylor;, Are we required to provide transportation services for those referrals provided by the homeless Liaison?
- Jennifer Pringle: The Liaison is responsible for identifying students experiencing homelessness. If a Liaison identifies a student experiencing homelessness and that student attends the school of origin, they are entitled to transportation. If the Liaison notifies the Transportation Department the student needs transportation, then the district would have to provide that transportation.
- Nyla Bell: Thank you.

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Jennifer Pringle: There is one other question about vaccination or immunization. About how to get the documentation when a young person is unaccompanied.

This is very tricky. The overwhelming majority of children and youth seeking enrollment in school have been fully immunized and it's just a matter of getting the records. If you have a youth who is homeless and unaccompanied, you can make a records request without parental consent and the prior school has to forward that information. You don't need parental consent from one district for records to another district for purposes of enrollment. If you're talking about a young person who is missing their immunizations, like they need a shot, different states handle it in different ways. For example, in New York, a person in parental relation can consent for a young person to get immunizations. School districts also have an obligation to refer the young person and make sure a health professional is available to give those shots free of charge. You will need to look at what your state policies are on that point.

Nyla Bell: Here is a question from Anita. Please discuss creative approaches to transportation when the district does not have the capacity to provide transportation services.

Jennifer Pringle: That is the number one concern because transportation is so expensive. Some districts look at regional transportation contracts. That is a group of districts bidding out transportation contracts as a group rather than individually to pay for the costs. One state is looking at trying to get a tech company to use a similar algorithm as what's being used by Uber and Lyft to try to more efficiently organize transportation routing and they are working with MIT. I have heard of districts contracting with local taxi providers where those taxi providers agreed to get the background check needed to provide school transportation so instead of paying for the whole route, you're paying for a ride in a vehicle that is less expensive than a school bus.

Some allow for parents to transfer their children and be reimbursed for mileage. I encourage you to reach out to your state's education agency and speak with whomever is responsible for pupil transportation. See if they can put you in touch with any transportation directors or superintendents who grapple with this issue. It's not just for kids in temporary housing. It's definitely something that districts have their eye on and we are hearing of innovations in the area.

Nyla Bell: We have another question. This is from Quidilla??? Divine. What happens if or when an LEA does not comply with many aspects of the law? For example, no one is designated as the homeless Liaison or there are no PDs offered or staff did not attend mandated training?

Jennifer Pringle: Depending on the type of issue, you can file a complaint with a particular office. If you are talking about, e.g., where there is not a designated Liaison, I would reach out to your state McKinney-Vento Act coordinator. They are responsible for maintaining a list of all the Liaisons for all the school districts. If the state coordinator is not responsive you can reach out to the U.S. Department of Education, the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program office. You can then escalate there as well. If you're talking about, e.g., there's no professional development training offered, that's something I would try to raise with your state coordinator or the U.S. Department of Education. If you're talking about something where the district is not in compliance with an individual student, like the student is not receiving transportation, or is not being enrolled in school, federal law requires all school districts have dispute resolution policies in place. When there's a dispute, the student should be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought and transportation must be provided until the dispute is resolved.

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

If you can't find that district dispute policy, reach out to your McKinney-Vento state coordinator who hopefully can put you in the right direction to find that.

Nyla Bell: We will take one more question before moving on. We have a question from Susan. Will you speak to how districts are implementing partial credit with the new division?

Jennifer Pringle: That's a great question. The short answer, they are implementing it unevenly. There are states like Washington and California that have state policies on awarding partial credit already in place for students regardless of their housing status. Most states don't have statewide policy so it's really up to the individual districts. In terms of best practices around that, if you have a student who is coming into the school building, I would recommend that you speak with the student about the classes taken and speak with the content expert in the school. Talk to that history teacher or science teacher who really knows the curriculum who can ask the right questions of the student and of the teacher who previously taught the student to figure out where is this student in the curriculum. How far along are they? Some districts will give assessments to try to figure out how far into this curriculum they are. It is a tough one. It's something hopefully we will see more guidance from states about this. I know that the National Center for Homeless Education is working on a toolkit right now about awarding partial credit so hopefully we will see more guidance around this in the future.

Nyla Bell: Thank you. Please continue to post your questions in the Q&A box. There were a couple questions asked about a specific point or bullet on a PowerPoint. One question, from J. Leon, was could you elaborate on number 6 particularly for unaccompanied youth. If you would like that question answered, please repost it but give us more information about what slide you are referring to because there are a number of slides that have a number 6.

Thank you so much. At this time, we will pass over the presentation to our next speaker, April Anderson. April is the McKinney-Vento District Liaison for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, Wilmington, Delaware.

April Anderson: Hello everyone. Thank you for allowing me to join you today. I'm excited about this conversation because it is something very important — especially with regards to all the kids that we want to be successful in our schools. A little bit about me. Once again, my name is April Anderson. I am the McKinney-Vento District Liaison for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, in Wilmington, Delaware. I entered this work through the teaching avenue. I taught high school English for about five or six years. From there, I was asked to become a dropout prevention specialist in our district to really address the needs of kids that showed signs of disconnection in our high schools and trying to reconnect them with our building so they could feel home in our schools to get to the point of graduation successfully. From there, I had the opportunity to transition to this role of McKinney-Vento Liaison. I haven't been doing it for too long but I have definitely learned a lot. Having the background as a teacher and on the academic side of education and now seeing more social issues that come up has provided me with a global perspective of not just our district but also of all students within our schools. I hope I can add diversity to the conversation we are having today.

A little bit about our Red Clay School District. Delaware being a very small state, we have a lot of students in our district that have been identified eligible for McKinney-Vento services. Because our district goes all the way up to the Pennsylvania line, we often have families that secure housing and shelters in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland. Because of that, we do

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

partner with those states to still allow our students to remain in schools of origin if they happened to be in shelters for very short time periods. Possibly three weeks. We will make sure we make provisions for transportation arrangements so our kids don't have a disruption of the educational process.

In 2016-2017, we identified 400 students and families from grades K to 12 who were eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act. One of the services we provide is transportation. We also work on helping our families secure long-term housing by partnering with some local shelters that help families secure long-term housing. We work with special education departments when it comes to implementing IEPs, as well as helping our students who want to go to college making sure they have all the support necessary whether it's through filling out financial aid documentation, helping them with a common application, and making sure they have all their credits from other schools they may have transitioned from. But also get the needed documentation so they can fill out the forms necessary to identify as a McKinney-Vento student going into college.

Some of the challenges that our families in Delaware experience are similar to most of our surrounding states. There are limited resources for our families. Many have vouchers for local motels or local shelters that unfortunately may last for 30 or 60 days, but within that time period families may still have not been able to secure permanent residency from the state or they may even have limited family or friend support that can help them stay on their feet during the time period of homelessness. That lends itself to other basic needs our kids may be lacking when it comes to food, clothing, or medical needs. Some of the things our district has done. We have partnered with local medical agencies, such as Christiana Care, where we have wellness centers in all our comprehensive high schools. We will be transitioning to creating wellness centers in our middle schools and immunization clinics at K-5 schools to help the families that struggle with requirements they need to get into school. We can provide that through our district so that our families are able to go to the buildings, they can get food, clothing, uniform assistance, and medical care they may not have access to because some of the barriers they have. We know that because many of these families have multiple transitions and short time periods, we want to make sure we do our best to address issues connected to truancy, lack of stability in their schools, school disconnectedness, and even the opportunity to engage in activities such as athletics, drama club, or afterschool STEM programs. All of those things that help keep our kids connected, we are trying to do our best to make sure we are able to provide those services to all of our students, but especially those that may be experiencing homelessness.

Jennifer had mentioned previously some of the challenges for our students and we talked a little about stigma. One of the things we have been trying to do when it comes to our families that are entering or enrolling into our school, experiencing homelessness, is not to use the word "homeless". We might say a family is living in transitional housing or experiencing hardship through no fault of their own, just to make sure our parents feel welcome and provide them as much support as possible despite the difficulty of their circumstances. When it comes to those enrollment requirements, we do our best to create a bridge between other states or other districts to get those the appropriate records and whatever we need to make sure when a child transitions into our schools, we can place them in appropriate grades and provide them with the credits needed to make sure they can graduate on time.

We also recognize that our students are more prone to emotional trauma, such as anxiety or depression. So we have created avenues of service with specific training. We have set up

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

schools that deal specifically with compassionate school curriculum so we are able to address the needs not just some social aspect but with our teachers and lesson plans to directly supports our students during trying times.

We know educationally, our students, especially our young children, might not have the social skills or academic skills to keep up with the rest of the students that might be in the classroom. Once again, we try to make sure we give them before-school opportunities and after-school opportunities to address deficits that may be caused from their circumstances. We try to take away barriers such as transportation by making sure we have the requisite Title I funding to fund resources and staff to address these needs.

When it comes to determining eligibility for students that are experiencing homelessness, this is a case-by-case determination. We try to get as much information as possible from our parents while remaining discreet and sensitive. Some parents are not comfortable being transparent which is understandable with their circumstances. When we ask our questions, we talk about how the circumstances may be very common, especially in the city of Wilmington per the backdrop we have here. And we emphasize that we are here to help them.

We give them many strategies to help address their challenges and think of creative ways we can address barriers either with securing long-term housing or transportation issues. We talked a little about transportation and how it can be a major barrier and a challenge for kids experiencing homelessness. As an LEA, we have the responsibility to provide all our students with transportation services to the school of origin.

One of the biggest challenges in our District is the delays in transportation. We can submit a referral to our transportation office to accept a bid to provide transport for a family of students. That time period from when a student has been identified eligible for services and the time period when the transportation is actually arranged can be some time, even a couple days or longer. In those situations, we make sure student absences aren't coded as unexcused. We make sure all absences are coded as excused after a student has been identified eligible for services. We also reach out to individual buildings to find out what opportunities there may be for afterschool support since we can provide transportation that can help a student get caught up. It's just making sure we have the voice of advocacy and we also work on empowering our parents to have that voice of advocacy for their children as well. So they can be as successful as any other student that may not be experiencing these challenges.

Once again, talking about unaccompanied use. This is a challenge because sometimes students don't feel comfortable self identifying their circumstances and they are not always aware of the available resources whether they are in the building or resources that might be available at the district level — that might cause some of these kids to fall between the cracks. Because these kids have limited access to basic necessities, they tend to lead to despair or struggle with anxiety and depression because of their circumstances.

We have a very positive experience in our district of a young man who has a parent who is incarcerated and a parent who is deceased but for whom we have been able to make eligible for resources under McKinney-Vento as an unaccompanied youth. This is a student that has really taken the reins of making sure he has what he needs. He's confident with voicing if he needs bus passes to get to work, if he needs gift cards which we provide possibly for food. He is very vocal in what he needs and he really appreciates the support he has received even with us being able to find him permanent housing despite the fact that he is an unaccompanied youth.

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

We find that once we develop those relationships with our students and make sure they are aware of what opportunities and support we can provide, and then making sure we keep ourselves available for any questions or concerns that they might have so that our kids can be supported in the best way possible.

We have school choice in Delaware. In the city of Wilmington, I was expressing to someone earlier that you could live on the same street as a family and the left side of the street be in one district and the right side of the street be in another district. A lot of times, we have challenges because there may be a lack of consistency when it comes to implementing enrollment policies and practices under the McKinney-Vento Act. These are some of the challenges we face, specifically even with some districts requiring landlord affidavits for some families that might live in a housing situation where they're not allowed to have more than a certain number of people living in a residence. Unfortunately, with those circumstances, some of our families are identified at a slower pace because they're trying to figure out how they can get their kids enrolled in school and services without becoming homeless themselves. We are working on making sure all districts provide equitable practices and policies and procedures for all families regardless of their situation so that kids and families have access to services to help them succeed.

I included this quote by Brene Brown about empathy is about connection, sympathy is about separation. One of the reasons I included that is because in our district we talk a lot about school climate and what type of climate we have in our buildings that can help families feel comfortable and transparent when it comes to talking about their living situation. I did include a link in the PowerPoint to a brief video where Brene Brown talks about empathy versus sympathy, which is an excellent professional development tool to give to those who deal with students to help start the conversation about the importance of empathy in our schools and creating a climate of inclusion so all parents, all families, and all students from the very front door feel welcomed in our building. We talked about something as general as customer service. We know today that because of some of the climate and safety concerns we have in our schools, in our District a person has to be buzzed into the building to get in. They also sometimes have to show ID just to see their child. We want to make sure even despite the fact we have safety measures, we still make sure our schools are welcoming to families because oftentimes, unfortunately, they are in a position where they feel vulnerable and they don't always feel comfortable sharing their situations — which can cause a delay of services.

When it comes to educators, being a former teacher, this is something I wish when I was in the classroom I paid more attention to. Recognizing that it could be a student, whether it's their appearance, they maybe become more withdrawn, there may be strong personality changes. It is not that these families or students are experiencing homelessness, they could just be some triggers or some things we want to pay attention to as a caring adult in the building to see if there might be something going on in the home that could be related to child homelessness.

Asking yourself this question: Can I be one caring adult for at least one child in my school? Maybe that is not a child who is experiencing homelessness but it could be. Creating a climate of inclusion and making sure either we get the professional development ourselves or we encourage our districts to provide this information on the importance of empathy and showing compassion to our families and students so when they do require certain services, we are available to provide that.

Supporting Homeless Students with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

What can parents and community members do? Advocacy is something very important. We talk about other community agencies helping families advocate for their child or having a professional advocate. In our district, we really are trying to implement parent programs or parent cafes that support students' success, and sharing that information with our parents. "Hey, we are having this parent cafe that talks about safety when it comes to technology with our students." Or "hey, we are having this parent café or discussion that talks about how to ask questions during your child's IEP meeting." Or understanding acronyms that teachers or administrators may be using and not being afraid to ask questions if they're not familiar with the process their child is being invited to go through. So, just empowering our parents and letting them know what types of support we can provide them so they can successfully advocate for their child despite what their circumstances are. And recognizing that, I know in our district we have some charter schools and magnet programs that maybe families who are experiencing homelessness are not aware of. So, do we, as the LEA, as the McKinney-Vento Liaison, as the guidance counselor, as administrator, are we sharing all these programs with all students so that we're equitable in providing services and opportunities regardless of a family's circumstances.

That's about all for me. I think it seems like we are still open to some questions for either myself or Jennifer.

Nyla Bell: Hello everyone. I think we have time for maybe one question. There was a question posted earlier that perhaps April and/or Jennifer can respond to. This is a question from Jillian. She wrote I think in response to Jennifer's presentation. You mentioned that families are not "forthcoming" about their living situation if homeless. Teaching in a virtual environment makes this identification even more challenging. Are there any subsets of this law that address this virtual learning environment?

Jennifer Pringle: There's nothing that addresses virtual learning environments explicitly in the law. That said, if you are a local educational agency and you offer online learning opportunities, the LEA still has an obligation to identify students experiencing homelessness. That makes it more challenging if you are not having a face-to-face connection. I haven't had any experience with that because in New York State, we don't have online districts. I would reach out to the state coordinator in Arizona. I want to say also Minnesota. But, I'm not sure. Who would know is the National Center for Homeless Education. They can put you in touch with state coordinators who might be dealing with that and who may have strategies.

Nyla Bell: If there are no more questions, I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of the Center for Education Equity, to our presenters, Jennifer Pringle and April Anderson, for sharing their expertise on this very important topic. If you would like to get in contact with them, you can reach them by their e-mail addresses and phone numbers. If you would like to learn more about the Center for Education Equity, you can check out our website, e-mail, or call us at the number posted on this page. This concludes today's webinar. Thank you for joining us and please take a moment to complete a survey after this webinar to let us know what you think of this webinar and what we can use to improve future webinars. Thank you and goodbye.

[Event Concluded.]