

December, 2023

# *Better* **TOGETHER**

Sharing information and resources for supporting Wisconsin's youngest students experiencing homelessness

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In September, the US Department of Education Released a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) that not only stressed the importance of spending American Rescue Plan -Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds, but it also updated the use of ARP-HCY funds. The updated uses cover a variety of areas, and they significantly expand the use of ARP-HCY funds for early childhood use.

In addition to the resources, updates, and event information shared in the *Better Together Newsletter*, this December issue will dive deeper into ARP-HCY funds. Continue reading to learn what ARP-HCY Funds are, how they can be used, and strategies for partnering with communities to support children and families experiencing homelessness.



Wisconsin Early Childhood  
**Collaborating Partners**





## What Are American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Funds?

The American Rescue Plan Act is an economic stimulus bill that was passed in 2021 to provide recovery for the effects of Covid-19. Funding in the act was allocated for “homeless children and youth” and distributed to states to use in supporting the needs of students experiencing homelessness. These American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) funds are one-time funds that must be obligated by September 30, 2024, and spent by January 31, 2025.

Wisconsin received \$10,097,813 in ARP-HCY funds to support the identification, enrollment, and school participation of children and youth experiencing homelessness, including through wrap-around services. These funds were distributed to Local Education Associations (LEAs) and CESAs.

To learn more about ARP-HCY funds and allocations check out [Wisconsin Department of Instruction’s Education for Homeless Children and Youth’s American Rescue Plan – Homeless Children and Youth Funds webpage](#). This webpage has detailed information on ARP-HCY funds in WI, LEAs ARP-HCY allocations, information about CESAs and consortia funds, and frequently asked questions.

## How are American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Funds Used?

ARP-HCY Funds are used for “[any expenses necessary to facilitate the identification, enrollment, retention, or educational success of homeless children and youth in order to enable homeless children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities](#).” Funds are used to remove barriers to education and to provide the same equal access to free public education as students who are not experiencing homelessness.

ARP-HCY Funds can be used under [16 allowable cost categories](#) as long as they are deemed reasonable and necessary for the student to participate fully in school activities.



## **NEW** **ARP-HCY Guidance**

To strengthen early childhood education [ARP-HCY funds may be used for] providing early childhood education to young children age birth to five who are not formally enrolled in the LEA but who are experiencing homelessness in the LEA.

## **OLD** **ARP-HCY Guidance**

[The US Department of Education] has reinforced that wraparound services provided through ARP-HCY funds must be focused on students who meet the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless and do not include services that only benefit parents. Parents and other family/household members can incidentally benefit...

## **Dear Colleague Letter and Early Childhood Expansion**

The Dear Colleague Letter expands ARP-HCY funds to be used for children who live within boundaries of a Local Education Association (LEA) but do not meet the age requirements to be formally enrolled in the LEA. This inclusion of early childhood now allows ARP-HCY funding to be used directly for young children, where it was previously only allowed to incidentally benefit them.


Homelessness most often occurs in the first years of life, and now ARP-HCY funds can be used directly to support the large number of children in Wisconsin experiencing homelessness in their early childhood years. SchoolHouse Connection estimates that 12,285 children under the age of six are experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin, nearly the same amount as the 13,400 students identified as experiencing homelessness enrolled in an LEA in the 2020/2021 school year. Expanding ARP-HCY funds to include early childhood nearly doubles the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness that can be supported with American Rescue Plan Funding.

Not only does the inclusion of early childhood in ARP-HCY uses create a broader reach of people the funds can support, but the funds can have a deeply positive impact when used for young children. The first five years of life are the most critical in development and learning. Early intervention matters, and connecting children and families with resources in the early years of life is supportive of lifelong learning and healthy development.



## Creating A Network of Community Partners

One common question asked is, “If children aren’t enrolled in the LEA, how are homelessness liaisons going to know the children in their early years in the area who are experiencing homelessness?” Children experiencing homelessness can be identified and supported through partnerships with families and the community.



A simple and effective way to identify students not yet enrolled in the LEA is to talk to families. Ask families currently identified as experiencing homelessness if they have younger children, and if they have any questions or concerns about the child’s(children’s) development. Asking this question with a supportive tone is a practice that is not only important while ARP-HCY funds are available, but also as a long-term practice for creating supportive reciprocal relationships with families. Homelessness liaisons have a responsibility under the McKinney-Vento Act to “ensure that families, children, and youth have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start, early intervention, and other public preschool programs, and referrals to services for health care, dental, mental health, substance use, housing and other appropriate services.” Building reciprocal relationships provides an opportunity for homelessness liaisons to make referrals and share information about early childhood programming, intervention, and supports for Wisconsin’s youngest children experiencing homelessness.

Creating a community network and partnerships with early childhood services is another opportunity to identify and support children experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is complex, and every family has different needs and experiences. Often families are working with different systems to meet their needs. Collaboration between systems builds bridges for family success and fosters community connections.

Learn more about community partnerships in this [2022 EHCY Conference Session, Supporting Wisconsin’s Youngest Students Experiencing Homelessness slide deck](#).



# Using ARP-HCY Funds to Support Early Childhood Development

ARP-HCY Funds are used for “any expenses necessary to facilitate the identification, enrollment, retention, or educational success of homeless children and youth in order to enable homeless children and youth to attend school and participate fully in school activities.” For children who are not yet attending school due to young age, funds may be used to meet the developmental needs of the child. Attention should be made to support all developmental domains as delineated in The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. Early childhood development and experiences link with later educational success. Using ARP-HCY funds to support a child’s developmental gains in the first years of life creates opportunity to fully participate in school activities and have educational success when the child enters the PreK-12 school system.

SchoolHouse Connection shares some examples of ways ARP-HCY funds may be used in Early Childhood. These uses highlight the use of funds to support a child’s healthy development:

- “Pay for costs associated with enrolling a young child experiencing homelessness in an early childhood development program
- Referrals
- Activities to determine eligibility for childcare subsidy
- Developmental screenings
- Early Intervention services
- Transportation associated with these activities”

## Additional ARP-HCY Resources

- SchoolHouse Connection: American Rescue Plan-Homeless Children and Youth Resource Page
- SchoolHouse Connection’s Working in Consortia to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness with ARP-HCY Funds
- SchoolHouse Connection’s Referring Young Children to Early Childhood Development Programs: Checklist for Homeless Liaisons







## New Resource: Family Economic Mobility Toolkit

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) recently developed a Family Economic Mobility Toolkit. Economic Mobility is a family's movement toward economic well-being. Every family's economic mobility is unique to them, and it does not always center around money. Economic mobility may relate to safety, security, basic needs, and hope for the future. The toolkit includes information on forming partnerships with families, talking to families about sensitive subjects, and resources to reflect on professional practices.

Check out the Family Economic Mobility Toolkit [here](#).



## Voices Amplified Podcast

Voices Amplified is a special four-part podcast series from the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). These listening sessions are meant to elevate the McKinney-Vento Act, partners in the field working with families, children and youth experiencing homelessness, provide insights, challenges, experiences, as well as opportunities for learning, growth, and partnership in the field.

Listen to the free podcast [here](#).

Voices Amplified image and description are from [https://nche.ed.gov/voices-amplified-podcast/?utm\\_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm\\_campaign=New\\_from\\_NCHE%3a\\_Voices\\_Amplified\\_Episode\\_3&utm\\_medium=email](https://nche.ed.gov/voices-amplified-podcast/?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=New_from_NCHE%3a_Voices_Amplified_Episode_3&utm_medium=email)



## Homelessness Awareness Month Proclamation

November was National Homelessness awareness month. In recognition of the month, state superintendent Dr. Jill Underly declared November, 2023 as Homelessness Awareness Month for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

[Read the proclamation here](#) or by clicking on the proclamation image in this newsletter.

## Education for Homeless Children and Youth Conference Recordings

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) hosted a free two-day virtual conference in November. All conference sessions were recorded. Recordings and conference materials can be found on [DPI's EHCY conference page](#).

Stay informed of The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program's updates, trainings, and webinar registration details by subscribing to their email communication list. To subscribe, provide your name and email on this [survey link](#).

*The mission of the WI Early Childhood Collaborating Partners: All children will be healthy, nurtured, safe and successful.*