



National Center for Homeless Education  
Supporting the Education of Children and  
Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
<http://nche.ed.gov>



## BEST PRACTICES IN INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BRIEF SERIES

# Coordinated Entry Processes: Building Mutual Engagement between Schools and Continuums of Care

### INTRODUCTION

This brief is designed for educators, including State Coordinators for Homeless Education and local homeless education liaisons, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care Program recipients. It provides a brief overview of HUD **coordinated entry processes**, and suggests strategies for building local coordinated entry engagement and collaboration between schools and CoCs. Briefs on additional homeless education topics are available at <http://nche.ed.gov/briefs.php>.

### FOR SCHOOLS: GET TO KNOW HUD HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The HUD-administered Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Programs provide funding to regional or local planning bodies to coordinate housing and service provision for individuals, families, and unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. Key elements of CoC-funded

### McKinney-Vento Definition of *Homeless*\* 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term “homeless children and youth”—

- A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence...; and
- B. includes —
  - i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
  - ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings...;
  - iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
  - iv. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

\* The above is the definition of *homeless* used by U.S. public schools. Schools and CoCs use different definitions of *homeless* for purposes of program administration, as established by each program’s authorizing federal statute. See the Eligibility for Services sidebar on page 4 for more information.

programs include

- **homelessness prevention assistance**, which helps individuals and families at risk of homelessness to maintain their housing by providing stabilization services and/or short-term emergency financial assistance (HUD, 2009, p. 9).
- **emergency shelter**, which provides a safe, secure, temporary place for individuals and families to stay while they seek permanent housing (p. 10).
- **rapid re-housing assistance**, which provides short- or medium-term rental assistance and supportive services to assist homeless individuals and families, including youth, to obtain quickly and maintain permanent housing (HUD, 2014, p. 1).
- **permanent supportive housing**, which combines long-term housing assistance and supportive services for individuals and families with disabilities experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2009, p. 10).
- **supportive services only**, which provides services such as case management, street outreach, housing search assistance, employment training, outpatient health and mental health services, and legal services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness for whom the provider is not also providing housing assistance (p. 10).

Visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/grantees/> to locate contact information for the CoC that serves your area.

#### FOR COCS: GET TO KNOW THE EHCY PROGRAM

The federal **Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program** is authorized under Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (hereafter the *McKinney-Vento Act*) and administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). The McKinney-Vento Act serves as the primary piece of federal legislation focused on the education of children and youth

experiencing homelessness, and was most recently reauthorized in December 2015 by the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**. The Act supports children and youth experiencing homelessness by ensuring their immediate and equal access to school, and providing valuable educational and other supports needed for school success. Rights and services provided by schools to students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act include

- immediate school enrollment, including in district-administered public preschool programs, even if lacking documents normally required for enrollment;
- continued enrollment in the same school (school of origin), even if moving to a different area, if this is in the student's best interest;
- the provision of transportation to and from the school of origin;
- assistance with expenses and fees that may create a barrier to full school participation; and
- assistance with college readiness and accessing federal student aid for college.

Additional supports and services provided to students experiencing homelessness under other federal programs include

- free school meals under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)**;
- educational support services, such as tutoring, school supplies, and counseling to address issues affecting learning, under the federal **Title I, Part A Program**; and
- special education services for homeless students with disabilities under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, state education departments must appoint a State Coordinator for Homeless Education (State Coordinator) to oversee the implementation of the Act within school districts throughout the state. Likewise, school districts must appoint a local homeless education liaison (local liaison) to oversee the

implementation of the Act within schools throughout the district. Contact your [State Coordinator](#) to find out who the local liaison is in your area.

## UNDERSTANDING COORDINATED ENTRY

A coordinated entry (CE) process is a systems-level approach for providing centralized and standardized access to housing and other community resources for people experiencing a housing crisis, including homelessness. CoC program recipients are required to establish and operate a CE process that meets the requirements of HUD's [CoC Program Interim Rule](#) [24 C.F.R. § 578.7(a)(8)], with additional requirements included in HUD's [Notice Establishing Additional Requirements for a Continuum of Care Centralized or Coordinated Assessment System \(CPD-17-01\)](#). Prior to the implementation of CE, individuals and families experiencing homelessness had to navigate a complex maze of programs to get assistance (USICH, 2017, p. 1). This may have included applying to each local housing or service program separately, undergoing multiple and often lengthy application and assessment processes (p. 1), and recounting traumatic experiences repeatedly. For these reasons, communities across the country began to develop and implement CE processes to standardize access to and assessment for services for those experiencing a housing crisis. CE also allows a CoC to make decisions about housing and support services based on the availability of resources across the whole community, rather than solely through an individual program (HUD, 2016, p. 1-2).

Key qualities of an effective CE process include

- **fair and equal access to the process**, regardless of where or how a person presents for services;
- **standardized access and assessment**, in which all CE locations offer the same assessment approach and make referrals using uniform decision-making processes;
- **prioritization for services** for individuals and families with the highest need;

- **a low-barrier approach** that does not screen people out for assistance because of perceived barriers to housing or services;
- **a Housing First orientation** that connects individuals and families to permanent housing quickly without preconditions or service participation requirements; and
- **a person-centered approach** that focuses on each participant's needs and incorporates participant choice throughout the process. (HUD, 2017, p. 15-16).

The implementation of CE may look different in each community based on local characteristics. Common CE models include

- **“single point of access”** at one central community location, sometimes referred to as centralized intake;
- **“multisite centralized access”** at several locations in a community, sometimes referred to as hubs or a hybrid approach;
- **“no wrong door”** available on location at any community provider, but still standardized and coordinated through one community-wide process; and
- **“virtual or phone access,”** which allows for virtual access (phone, website, etc.) to CE, and may be combined with any of the models above (HUD, 2016, p. 4).

## SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT IN COORDINATED ENTRY PROCESSES

While federal programs targeted to address homelessness are essential, they are insufficient alone to achieve the goal of preventing and ending homelessness. To achieve this goal, communities also must enlist the broader set of federal, state, and local programs that serve low-income Americans (USICH, 2016, p. 1). To this end, HUD and its federal partners encourage CoCs to engage mainstream service providers, including local homeless education liaisons and the schools they represent, in the planning and implementation of CE (HUD, 2016, p.

10; HUD, 2017, p. 17). The term “mainstream service providers” refers to programs or agencies that provide services that are not targeted specifically to homeless persons but that help wrap needed services around the individual or family experiencing a housing crisis, including homelessness. Examples of mainstream services

## ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES

Schools and CoCs use different definitions of *homeless* for purposes of program administration, as established by each program’s authorizing federal statute, with the **ED definition** including children and youth who may not be considered homeless under the **HUD definition**. Specifically, under the ED definition, children and youth sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason are considered homeless [42 U.S.C. §11434a(2)(B)(i)]. Further, children and youth living in motels or hotels due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations are considered homeless [42 U.S.C. §11434a(2)(B)(i)], even if the family or youth is paying part or all of the cost of the motel/hotel stay.

Schools and CoCs should work together to understand the differences between the ED and HUD definitions of *homeless*, and how these differences may affect eligibility for programs and supports connected to the CE process for individual youth and families. Importantly, CE is intended to serve not only individuals and families experiencing homelessness, but also to provide prevention and diversion services to those experiencing a housing crisis (HUD, 2017, p. 12; HUD, 2016, p. 9; USICH, 2017, p. 2); as such, CoCs should work with schools and other mainstream providers to ensure that youth and families meeting both the ED and HUD definitions of *homeless* have access to needed services and supports through the CE process.

Visit [http://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/det\\_elig.pdf](http://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf) for more information on determining homelessness according to the ED definition. Visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4783/determining-homeless-status-of-youth/> for more information on determining homelessness according to the HUD definition.

include mental health services, **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**, **Medicaid**, **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, **early childhood supports**, and education-based supports (HUD, 2016, p. 6-7).

## Coordinated Entry Planning

Given their experience in reaching and serving families and youth experiencing homelessness, school personnel are ideally positioned to provide unique insights about the needs of these families and youth. These insights can help inform CE planning in the following ways:

- **Creating a youth- and family-friendly CE process**  
Schools can help CoCs think through how to create a CE process that is welcoming and easily accessible for youth and families with children. This may include recommendations for how to develop general CE access points that are welcoming for unaccompanied youth and families with children, or separate CE access points designed specifically for these subpopulations (HUD, 2017 p. 7).
- **Developing an effective CE marketing plan**  
HUD requires CoCs to establish written policies and procedures for marketing CE to all populations in the CoC’s geographic area (p. 11). Schools can be key partners in sharing information about CE as part of their regular interactions with families and youth experiencing homelessness. Schools also can provide input to CoCs about locations frequented by families and youth experiencing homelessness so that informational materials may be placed there.
- **Establishing an assessment protocol that is reflective of the unique needs of youth and families**  
Two key CE elements include assessment and prioritization, wherein the CE process derives an indicator of client vulnerability based on responses to assessment questions and prioritizes the clients with the greatest need for assistance (pp. 5-6). HUD allows for variations in assessment approaches to be used to account for unique population-based

vulnerabilities and risk factors (p. 5). Schools can help ensure that the CE assessment process reflects the unique vulnerabilities of unaccompanied youth and families with minor children (p. 8), including incorporating youth-friendly language, and considering the effects of homelessness on young people's development, education, and long-term life outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

### Coordinated Entry Implementation

Once a CE process has been implemented and is operational, schools are likely to function in one or both of the following roles as part of the CE process:

- **Programs that connect youth and families in need of services to CE** (HUD, 2016, p. 11)  
In this role, schools ask basic questions about housing status and connect families or youth to the CE process when a housing or related supportive service need is identified that cannot be met by the school.
- **Programs to which the CE process connects youth and families in need of services** (p. 11)  
In this role, CE access points connect youth and families to schools to ensure school enrollment for school-aged children and youth, and the receipt of valuable school-based supports.

Additionally, school engagement in CE may include participation in coordinated case planning. In case planning, service providers across agencies share information to ensure a comprehensive understanding of each client's needs. HUD encourages the incorporation of case conferencing in CE intake protocols, as assessment tools may not yield a complete picture of the client's needs for purposes of prioritization (HUD, 2017, p. 10).

<sup>1</sup> For more information, download *Enhance Early Childhood Program and System Integration with the Continuum of Care (CoC) Coordinated Entry Process* at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Enhance-Early-Childhood-Program-and-System-Integration-with-the-CoC-Coordinated-Entry-Process.pdf>.

## LOCAL LIAISON AUTHORITY TO AFFIRM HUD ELIGIBILITY

The McKinney-Vento Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), authorizes local liaisons to affirm that a child or youth participating in school programming, and his or her immediate family, meets the eligibility requirements for homeless assistance provided by HUD CoC and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding recipients. According to ESSA, after receiving training on the HUD definition of *homeless*, the local liaison is authorized to make such affirmations without further agency action from HUD [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(D)].

In its EHCY Program *Non-Regulatory Guidance* (2016, pp. 38-39), ED provides additional detail about implementing this new authority. The *Guidance* explains that while local liaisons can determine CoC and ESG eligibility, it is up to individual CoCs to determine whether the family or youth may need to meet additional eligibility criteria for individual programs participating in the CoC. For example, many HUD-funded rapid rehousing projects are limited to individuals and families who are living unsheltered or in emergency shelters. Schools and CoCs should discuss what role this new legislative authority may play in implementing local CE processes (p. 37).

## COORDINATED ENTRY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS AND COCS

Schools and CoCs should consider the following steps for establishing and growing partnerships to develop effective youth- and family-friendly CE processes.

### 1. Get to know each other

The first step to building a successful partnership is to get to know your partner. This involves establishing contact and familiarizing yourself with what your partner can contribute to your collective efforts. It also is helpful to recognize values and goals that are shared across partner agencies.

Local liaisons should contact their **local CoC**.

CoCs can help local liaisons and schools become familiar with the programs and supports that may be available to children, youth, and their families

## LOCAL SPOTLIGHTS

In Washington State, the Spokane City and County CoC has partnered with local schools to plan and implement family- and youth-friendly CE access points. For several years, the CoC has operated its Homeless Families Coordinated Assessment (HFCA) process. Local liaisons from area school districts visit HFCA sites on Mondays to connect with families with school-age children at intake to ensure immediate school enrollment and the provision of needed school-based supports. On days when liaisons are not present at HFCA sites, CE intake personnel refer families with school-age children to area local liaisons to ensure connection with school. Liaisons also help inform the assessment process for individual families by sharing information about the family's circumstances with intake personnel through informal case conferencing. For more information about Spokane's CoC-school collaboration, contact [Leslie Camden-Goold](#), McKinney-Vento Liaison, Central Valley School District, or [Sarah Miller](#), McKinney-Vento Liaison, Spokane Public Schools.

Additional examples of CoC-school partnership on CE include:

- St. Paul, MN: [Anne McInerney](#), local liaison for St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS), serves as the secretary for the St. Paul/Ramsey County CoC. Building on years of collaboration with the CoC under Anne's leadership, SPPS handles CE intake for a portion of the unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness who attend district schools.
- Nashville, TN: [Catherine Knowles](#), local liaison for Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS), co-chairs the CE committee for the Nashville-Davidson County CoC. In this role, Catherine provides input on how the CoC can make the CE process more youth- and family-friendly. Additionally, MNPS and the CoC has established a process for mutual referrals between schools and CE access points.

experiencing homelessness through HUD-funded housing programs and other programs participating in the local CE process. Many CoCs convene regular meetings, as well as committees, such as CE, youth, or education committees, that may be appropriate settings for collaborating with schools on developing an inclusive and effective CE process. Efforts by the school system to partner with CoCs on CE and other relevant initiatives will ensure compliance with McKinney-Vento Act mandates that schools collaborate with and provide referrals to housing providers to improve the provision of comprehensive services to children, youth, and their families experiencing homelessness [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(6)(A)(iv); 42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(4)].

CoCs, in turn, should contact their [State Coordinator for Homeless Education](#) to find out who the local liaison is in their area. Local liaisons can help CoCs become familiar with the many supports schools can provide. Given that schools operate multiple programs that provide valuable help to students experiencing homelessness, including McKinney-Vento, Title I, school meals, and special education, it may be appropriate for schools to assign a lead point of contact to the local CE process, while still ensuring broad representation of relevant school programs and supports. Efforts by CoCs to partner with local liaisons and their respective school systems will help facilitate compliance with mandates included in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the HEARTH Act, that CoC programs establish policies and practices that are consistent with, and do not restrict the exercise of, the educational rights afforded to students experiencing homelessness under federal law [42 U.S.C. § 11386(b)(4)(D)]; that CoC programs that provide housing or services to families designate a staff person to ensure that children are enrolled in school and connected to appropriate services within the community [42 U.S.C. § 11386(b)(4)(D)]; and that CoC programs, to the maximum extent practicable, place families with children as close as possible to their school of origin so as not to disrupt their education [42 U.S.C. § 11386(b)(7)]. Further, CoC partnership with school systems positions CoC collaborative

applicants to meet application selection criteria established by the HEARTH Act, namely that CoC funding recipients collaborate with schools to assist in the identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness and to ensure that these children and youth are informed of their eligibility for school-based McKinney-Vento services [42 U.S.C. § 11386a(b)(1)(B)(iii)]. CoCs with geographic areas that span multiple school districts will want to engage with local liaisons from all included districts.

## 2. Connect early and regularly

HUD encourages CoCs to involve youth-serving programs and systems, including schools, in the CE planning and implementation process early and on an ongoing basis (2017, p. 17; 2016, p. 10-11). Early and regular connection between CoCs and schools will help to ensure that

- youth-serving providers have the opportunity to understand and build confidence in the goals of CE;
- youth-serving providers have the opportunity to contribute critical insights about serving young people through CE in a trauma-informed, developmentally-appropriate way;
- the local CE process connects with the broadest inventory of youth resources; and
- CoCs and community stakeholders reach a mutual understanding on how youth and families access CE from mainstream programs.

## 3. Develop protocols to guide CE engagement

While HUD provides general guidelines for implementing an effective CE process (2017, pp. 6-15), each CoC's CE process may look different based on the needs of each individual community or region. As such, each CoC and its partner school district(s) should develop protocols for how referrals between CoCs and schools should be made. Issues to consider include:

- **Making a referral**  
What steps should a CoC take if a school-aged youth or family with school-aged children seeks assistance through CE? How

should the CoC connect the family or youth with the school system (phone, email, online form, or other method)? Conversely, what steps should school personnel take when referring youth and families in need to the CE process based on the community's unique CE model?

- **Sharing information**

Schools and CoCs may find it beneficial to outline what information would be helpful to provide when making a referral. For instance, CoCs may request that schools ask several housing-related questions to decide whether a youth or family should be referred to CE, and that this information be provided at the time of referral to CE. Similarly, schools may request that CoCs inquire about the age and grade level of children in the household, and that this information be available at the time of referral to the school system.

- **Maintaining confidentiality**

CoCs and schools should discuss how the confidentiality of youth and families will be protected during the referral process. This might involve obtaining consent from the youth or family to share their information with the partner agency, or providing referral information to the youth or family and allowing the youth or family to initiate contact independently. For more information about interagency data sharing, see *Interagency Data Disclosure: A Tip Sheet on Interagency Collaboration*.

## 4. Reassess engagement periodically

Implementing CE involves significant systems transformation for many CoCs, as they shift from an approach that focuses on individual programs and projects to an approach wherein all CoC programs and projects work interdependently. Initiating or deepening collaboration with CoCs also may constitute a systems change for schools. As with any systems change, modifications may need to be made over time as lessons are learned and best practices evolve. To this end, collaboration on CE should not be a one-time event; rather it should be ongoing, providing opportunities

to assess effectiveness and make adjustments to practice where needed (HUD, 2017, p. 17).

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT

No single system or funding stream has the ability to solve homelessness by itself. To achieve success in preventing and ending homelessness, communities must shift from an approach centered on individual programs or systems working in isolation to one of cross-sector coordination and leveraging of resources. By joining forces to implement an effective and youth- and family-friendly CE process, CoCs and schools can ensure the most effective and comprehensive delivery of housing and needed supports to youth and families experiencing a housing crisis, including homelessness.

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Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals oversee the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at [https://nche.ed.gov/states/state\\_resources.php](https://nche.ed.gov/states/state_resources.php).

For more information on the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness, contact the NCHE Helpline at 800-308-2145 or [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org).

**Local Contact Information:**