

# Chapter Thirteen: Data Collection & Requirements



## Section 13.1 Why Data Matters

Regardless of whether you love or hate working with data, there are several reasons why it is important to collect and analyze data related to the education of homeless children and youth. At the most basic level, collecting data is important because the McKinney-Vento Act requires it to be collected and provided to the federal government [42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(1), 42 U.S.C. §11432(f)(3)].

Additionally, local educational agencies (LEAs) that compete for subgrant funds must provide needs assessment information as part of their subgrant applications. Applications must reflect

- the needs of the students the subgrants will serve and
- a demonstrated need for the funds [42 U.S.C. §11433(b)].

In considering subgrant awards, state educational agencies (SEAs) may look at an LEA's needs assessment data to consider

- the number of homeless children and youth enrolled in the LEA and
- the LEA's ability to meet the needs of the students when selecting districts that will receive funds (42 U.S.C 11433(c)).

Data also help districts improve the quality of services provided to homeless students. In addition to addressing unmet needs in a district, the quality of subgrant applications and proposed activities must be considered as a part of the review process [42 U.S.C. § 11433(c)(1), 42 U.S.C. § 11433(c)(3)]. By providing data that address the success of interventions already taken or that address remaining needs, districts can strengthen both their interventions and their subgrant applications.

Furthermore, requirements under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandate that LEAs set aside funds to serve homeless students [20 U.S.C. § 6313(c)(3)(A)]. While some states and LEAs

use a formula to calculate the amount of funds to set aside, all districts that receive Title I, Part A funds must coordinate activities to support the education of homeless students with McKinney-Vento activities and describe those activities in their district plans, which require data [20 U.S.C. § 6312(b)(1)(E)(ii)]. State academic assessment systems also must include data on the educational outcomes of homeless students for accountability purposes [20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(2)(C)].

## Section 13.2 What Data to Collect

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) outlines which data to collect regarding the education of homeless children and youth in a tool called the Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR). The CSPR includes data reporting for several federal education programs; questions related to homeless education are in Section 1.9. To assist State Coordinators with the data requirements found in the CSPR, the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) publishes an annual data collection guide that may be helpful for local homeless liaisons. The data collection guide can be downloaded from the NCHE website at:

[http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/fed\\_data\\_coll\\_guide.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/fed_data_coll_guide.php).

Some information requested by the CSPR pertains to all public school districts in the state, while other questions only pertain to districts that receive subgrants. The portion of the CSPR related to the education of homeless children and youth addresses

- the number of LEAs that do and do not receive subgrants;
- the number of homeless students enrolled in public schools by grade level;
- the primary nighttime residence of homeless students;
- the number of homeless students in subgroups enrolled in school; (including students who are limited English proficient, unaccompanied homeless youth, students with disabilities, and migratory students);
- the number of homeless children and youth served (subgrant districts only);
- the number of homeless students in subgroups served (subgrant districts only); and
- the academic performance of homeless students in reading, math, and science.

## Section 13.3 How to Collect and Submit Data

Collecting data about homeless education requires collaboration both within the district and with the State Coordinator. In the fall of each year, typically in the months of November and December, ED opens the CSPR tool to allow State Coordinators to submit required data from the previous school year. In order for State Coordinators to submit the mandated data to the federal government, SEAs likewise request data from LEAs and typically require LEAs to complete their data submissions in the late spring or early summer to coincide with the end of the school year. Most LEA data are submitted to the SEA by a designated person within the district, regardless of the program type. The liaison must work with the responsible individual to ensure that the data submitted are accurate and reflect the work of the district to serve homeless students. SEAs use data collection systems that are electronic and require very little to no actual paper reports. Some states may have a secondary data collection process for districts that receive subgrants. The State Coordinator can provide liaisons with information about how and when the LEA should submit data.

As no two state or LEA data collection systems are exactly alike, it is important to know with whom the liaison should work to collect and submit data, as well as which questions to ask about the way data should be collected, stored, and submitted. All liaisons are encouraged to work with their State Coordinators, in addition to any local district staff involved in reporting, to make sure all required information is submitted in a timely manner. Important questions to ask include:

- Does the district have a data reporting technician? Who is that person or are those persons?
- Are there additional data, which the primary data system is unable to collect, that the liaison is responsible for submitting to the SEA? What are those data? What is the process for submitting those data?
- How does the LEA collect and store data? Does it use a web-based or other electronic student information system? Does it rely on spreadsheets?
- What is the deadline for submitting data to the SEA? Does the LEA have additional internal deadlines to allow administrators to review the data before the final submission to the SEA?

- What steps does the LEA take to ensure the data submitted are accurate? Are there any steps required by the SEA to ensure data are accurate?
- Can the LEA correct data that have already been submitted? Are there additional deadlines for corrections?
- In addition to the annual data collection requirements outlined by ED that apply to all LEAs, does the SEA require additional information on student outcomes for homeless students in any particular area, either through improvement plans or subgrant applications?

### Section 13.4 Using the Data

As previously mentioned, academic and related data can be used to improve program activities and academic results for homeless students. In addition to the data that must be collected to satisfy components of the McKinney-Vento Act, other state and federal programs also require data to be collected. By comparing data from those programs to the data from the McKinney-Vento program, LEAs can learn a great deal about homeless students in their school settings.

With the advent of electronic data systems and unique student identifiers, LEAs can easily analyze data from various required program areas. Unique student identifiers are numbers that are either generated randomly when a student enrolls in public school for the first time or are generated based on a set of characteristics unique to the student. (Unique student identifiers used by public school systems are not the social security number of a student.) Regardless of the number of times a student changes schools or districts within a single state, they keep the same student identifier number until high school completion, which allows for a comprehensive snapshot of a student's academic performance. If a student moves out of the state but later returns, they are re-assigned the same number they had prior to leaving the state. Ultimately, all student data submitted to the SEA are based on the student identifiers. This allows liaisons to request interdisciplinary data from data technicians in their LEA without requiring additional data collections.

Other data available at the LEA level includes

- the number of suspensions and expulsions,
- reasons for expulsions,
- attendance rates,

- participation in gifted and talented programs,
- the number of students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the disabilities addressed by the IEP,
- poverty rates,
- the number of students who graduated,
- types of diplomas earned,
- the number of students who dropped out,
- reasons cited by students for dropping out,
- participation in advanced placement courses,
- performance in advanced placement courses,
- participation in school meals, and
- the number of students served by Title I, Part A.

By comparing these data to the data required by the McKinney-Vento Act, liaisons can identify areas for improvement that are unique to their LEAs. For example, while district personnel may assume that all homeless students receive free school meals, a review of the number of homeless students compared to the number of homeless students who receive free school meals may highlight significant gaps in services. A more in-depth examination of data related to homeless students can improve collaboration as well. For example, uncovering high rates of suspensions for defiance in the classroom combined with high rates of IEPs for emotional disturbances may allow homeless liaisons and special education teachers to work together to create more effective IEPs.

Additionally, other public data that are easily available, such as unemployment or poverty rates, could help liaisons and community agencies collaborate to more accurately identify homeless students when the number of students identified is low, but unemployment or poverty rates are high. This type of data examination should be used by LEAs to strengthen the school improvement plans required under state and federal law to improve outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

## Section 13.5 Useful Links

**The Federal Data Collection Form is an appendix of the *Consolidated State Performance Report Federal Data Collection Guide for State Coordinators of Homeless Education*. The form contains all the specific data points for which State Coordinators must submit data to ED each year and may help liaisons plan their data collections. The form can be accessed online at:**  
[http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/fed\\_data\\_coll\\_guide.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/fed_data_coll_guide.php)

**Districts should carefully review all data sharing policies and agreements on a regular basis to ensure they are consistent with state and federal laws that protect student records and confidentiality. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that outlines what information may be shared, by whom, and when. To ensure district policies are consistent with requirements under FERPA, liaisons can find out more by visiting**  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>.

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