CHAPTER 10: PURPOSEFUL COLLABORATION

10.1 Executive Summary

Interagency and cross-system collaboration to provide wraparound services can ease transitions for highly mobile populations, connecting them to resources that ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness have access to healthcare, nutrition, housing, and other support services in addition to the academic support they receive at school. In building these relationships or partnerships, you can contribute to developing an interagency or cross-program safety net that can prevent children, youth, and their families from staying longer in or going deeper into homelessness and the homeless assistance system.

As a state coordinator, collaborating is essential to your day-to-day job. Whether engaging in federally mandated communication with key stakeholders or developing deeper partnerships within communities to ensure the effectiveness of your state’s EHCY program, you and the partners you collaborate with share a common goal of supporting students and families experiencing homelessness. Sharing resources to provide wraparound services can further this goal more effectively and efficiently. This chapter provides information and helpful framing for intentionally and strategically collaborating within and across systems to achieve the most impact for the students you serve.

In this chapter, we will outline:

- legislative requirements for collaboration under the McKinney-Vento Act;
- key areas for interagency collaborations;
- why effective collaboration is necessary; and
- the outcomes of effective collaboration.
10.2 McKinney-Vento Act Requirements

Interagency and cross-system collaboration are critical components of your responsibility as a state coordinator under the McKinney-Vento Act. The McKinney-Vento Act specifies a set of role groups, programs, and agencies with whom state coordinators must collaborate, as outlined in the table below.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator Type</td>
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</table>
| **Educators** | • teachers  
• special education personnel  
• administrators  
• child development and preschool program personnel |
| **Service providers** | • public and private child welfare and social service agencies  
• juvenile and family courts  
• agencies providing mental health services  
• domestic violence agencies  
• childcare providers  
• runaway and homeless youth centers  
• providers of services and programs funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.) |
| **Providers of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing** | • public housing agencies  
• shelter operators  
• operators of transitional housing facilities  
• providers of transitional living programs for young people experiencing homelessness |
| **Local liaisons** | • LEA liaisons designated under subsection (g)(1)(J)(ii) for homeless children and youths |
| **Community organizations** | • community organizations and groups representing students experiencing homelessness and their families |

**Additional interagency coordination mentioned in the McKinney-Vento Act**

The McKinney-Vento Act also requires state coordinators to “coordinate with state and local housing authorities responsible for developing comprehensive affordable housing strategies under Section 105 of the Cranston/Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (P.L. 101-625) to minimize educational disruption for children and youths who become homeless.” (42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(5)(b))

The broad set of stakeholders outlined in the legislation includes colleagues within your SEA, LEAs, other governmental agencies, direct service providers, and community-based organizations. The following
sections of this chapter will offer suggestions to manage these connections, which may require expanding circles of influence and purposeful outreach.

### 10.3 Essential Interagency Collaborations

A significant part of your daily job as a state coordinator will be collaborating with other governmental agencies that share a common goal of supporting children and youth. The non-regulatory guidance published by the U.S. Department of Education recommends state coordinators:

- coordinate housing, health, and other services with the regional representatives of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness; and
- coordinate and consult with state and local policymakers to ensure legislation and policies do not create barriers to the education of homeless children and youths.³

The table below highlights mandated coordination between EHCY and other educational programs. For several of these programs, NCHE has published briefs that can provide information and resources to support your work.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Required Coordination with Education Programs</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Partner</strong></td>
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<td>Title I, Part A</td>
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<td>IDEIA</td>
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### Head Start

<table>
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<tr>
<th>McKinney-Vento Act and Head Start</th>
<th>45 CFR § 1302.53 (a)(2)(vi)</th>
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<tr>
<td>With increasing focus on early childhood education, Head Start is a key partner to support early care and education for young children experiencing homelessness. The partnership can take various forms. Advisory councils authorized under Head Start may require homeless education expertise—state coordinators may serve on these councils, conduct joint trainings, or jointly develop a state memorandum.</td>
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</table>
| State childcare agencies and administrators of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services overseeing the Childcare and Development Fund are also critical partners to engage to ensure serving young children experiencing homelessness is part of the discussion.

### Career Technical Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (reauthorized Perkins V)</th>
<th>20 USC § 2301</th>
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<td>Perkins V, the reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act in 2018, includes new provisions to help young people experiencing homelessness access and succeed in career and technical education (CTE) programs, including designating individuals experiencing homelessness, as defined by the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act, as one of nine special populations. These new provisions focus on addressing the needs of special populations in the areas of state and local plans, funding, and evaluation and accountability.</td>
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**Definitional challenges in interagency coordination**

When working with partners, technical definitions of homelessness will influence your ability to collaborate. These definitions describe an individual’s eligibility for services under the law as well as the governmental process for the provision of those services. Other definitions of homelessness in government and common use differ from the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition. Recognizing the definitions used by other agencies is critical as it may affect the identification of homeless children and youth, how referrals are made, and limit access to services in some cases.

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For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers individuals experiencing homelessness in four categories, under which individuals who are “doubled up” would not be eligible for services:

**Table: HUD Definitional Categories for Homelessness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1 - Literally Homeless</th>
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<tr>
<td>Category 2 - Imminent Risk of Homelessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 3 - Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category 4 - Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence</td>
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</table>

ED’s non-regulatory guidance reinforces the importance of state coordinators and local liaisons coordinating with federal agencies that use the McKinney-Vento Act’s definition of homeless, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to “determine eligibility consistently across agencies and expedite referrals for services,” including access to food and nutrition benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The guidance also notes that while some programs administered by federal agencies may use different definitions of “homeless,” coordination with these programs is critical to ensure homeless students have access to services besides education to address their basic needs, such as housing and health.6

For more information on navigating different agency definitions of homelessness and eligibility for services, see the NCHE Brief: Housing and Education Collaborations to Serve Homeless Children, Youth, and Families.

**The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)**

USICH was initially authorized by Congress through Title II of the McKinney-Vento Act in 1987 to serve as an “independent establishment” within the executive branch. This council coordinates and catalyzes the federal response to homelessness, working in close partnership with Cabinet Secretaries and other senior leaders across its 19 federal member agencies. To learn more about their work and the federal strategic plan to address issues of homelessness, visit [https://www.usich.gov/](https://www.usich.gov/).

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10.4 Purposeful Collaboration

It can be daunting to think about collaboration with a wide set of stakeholders—especially when navigating different organizational contexts and constraints. Keeping the driving purpose behind these requirements in mind will help you build purposeful collaborations within state and local government, as well as deep relationships in the communities served. While developing this network and cultivating influence with partners takes great effort, this work will position you well to center and support students and families experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, your efforts in this fluid and not so defined part of your duties will enable you to contribute to the prevention of homelessness in your State or at least the prevention of families staying longer or going deeper into the homeless assistance system.

CBOs are vital to supporting the non-academic needs of students experiencing homelessness, especially those from marginalized populations (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and other students of color, LGBTQI+ students, migrant students, immigrant students, UHY, and system-involved youth). Collaborations with CBOs can increase the capacity of school staff and improve student educational outcomes, such as attendance and graduation rates. See NCHE’s report on collaborating with CBOs and the School Social Workers Brief for more information.

The coordination across agencies and systems required in the McKinney-Vento Act is designed to:

- ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness are promptly identified;
- ensure all children and youth experiencing homelessness have access to, and are in reasonable proximity to, available education and related support services; and
- raise awareness of school personnel and service providers to the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness.
When done properly, your efforts to coordinate across agencies, diverse stakeholders within your state education system, and CBOs have the potential to impact students experiencing homelessness. As you engage in this work, your efforts will drive the following outcomes:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>Increasing awareness of the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness through working with other agencies...</td>
<td>enables programs and agencies to expand or customize their services and builds strong cross-agency advocacy and policy initiatives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordinating services across programs...</td>
<td>uses resources efficiently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aligning policies and practices...</td>
<td>removes barriers to services across programs.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Additional Resources

- NCHE Brief: [Collaborating with CBOs brief](#)
- NCHE 10 in 10: [Module #8: State Level Coordination](#)
- NCHE Webinar: [Title I, Part A Homeless Set-Aside](#)
- NCHE Webinar: [Serving HCY with Disabilities](#)
- US Dept. of Education: [Questions and Answers on Special Education and Homelessness](#)
- NCHE Resource: [EHCY Program Review and Planning Guide](#)