Ending Student Homelessness
Student Stability Innovation Grants

ANCHOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

Reducing and **ending student homelessness** requires deep, intentional collaboration between school and homelessness systems. Student Stability Innovation Grants is a new systems improvement effort by A Way Home Washington to change the way education and homelessness systems work together in Anchor Communities. Each Anchor Community will set goals and imagine creative strategies to move towards ending student homelessness, and this resource is meant to be a starting place for developing improvement projects.

Strategies for Identifying Improvement Ideas

Centering Youth Voice
- Hold a focus group of McKinney Vento students to identify specific barriers to becoming stably housed. What kinds of changes would young people make? How would they explain the process of connecting with the homelessness system? What identification strategies can they come up with? Young people are the best positioned to identify barriers and system changes that would result in the changes we all want to see. Act on their ideas quickly and let them know the results.
- Do a co-design session with students around one school's referral process and test that process for a month.

Put Data Sets in conversation with each other
- Ask one McKinney-Vento Liaison to compare the number of young people experiencing unaccompanied homelessness in their OSPI data from the previous year with their current list to see possible differences/similarities in numbers or any other trends. Consider how COVID-19 may be impacting identification.
- Show one or more McKinney Vento Liaisons aggregate data for minors on your community BNL and ask them what stands out to them? Do they think it is accurate? What would make it more accurate?
- **Pro tip:** you should be using your data frequently to set goals, make decisions and track progress

Process Mapping
- Identify a part of the system to unpack more deeply, such as the referral pathway between a school and homelessness intake, the steps a school takes to identify unaccompanied students, or the decision points in disciplinary actions at school. Create a process map highlighting possible areas of improvement and choose at least one to test in the next week. Ask your coach or check out our process mapping guide for more ideas for doing this!

Bright Spots
- Figure out what different schools are already trying. What can we improve? Are there any barriers to accessing these resources? How can we leverage basic needs into long term stability? What is one school doing that another could try? Identify one change to test for the next week.

McKinney Vento Liaisons are not allowed to share private student data with service providers without consent or contribute data from their lists to a community BNL. They can, however, draw inferences from the two data sets and discuss aggregated trends they see in their data.

Brainstorming Examples

The following Problem-Question-Idea framework can be used as a tool to help Anchor Communities brainstorm potential improvement projects that can be funded by the Student Stability Innovation Grants.

Problem: When we looked at our last 3 months of data, we only saw 1-3 minors in our system each month, and we have an active number of 175-200 per month over that same time period. We don't think this is accurate.

Questions this might bring up:

- What do McKinney Vento Liaisons think when they see this information? Do they think the problem is more about the challenge of identifying unaccompanied homeless students or the challenge of referring to the homelessness system?
- How does OSPI data from the previous year compare to what we see?
- Do young people say that they know who their McKinney Vento Liaison is?
- How many unaccompanied homeless students do McKinney Vento Liaisons identify after the beginning of the year

Ideas we might test:

1. Pay for a license to get one McKinney Vento Liaison read-only access to HMIS and set up a process for doing regular referral checks over a 2-month period.
2. Partner with a school program to create an after-school drop in space for LGBTQ+ students for 3 months to see if this increases referrals from that school.
3. Hire a peer outreach support worker to work alongside a McKinney Vento Liaison for two months and test whether that increases identification or referrals.
4. Identify the most commonly spoken languages other than English in the district and translate McKinney Vento materials into that language. Test a process for putting those materials in places frequented by homeless youth and see if self-identification increases.

Problem: Over the last 4 months, ~90% of young people referred to the homelessness system by McKinney Vento Liaisons have too low a vulnerability score to access housing.

Questions this might bring up:

- What is the average score that students are getting?
- What kind of housing options do those students say they need?
- What is the age breakdown for students? Are a lot of them minors?

Ideas we might test:

1. Test a small scale emergency host home project with one school, subsidizing a few families to be able to provide emergency shelter to students in crisis for short periods of time and pair that with connections to case management support to see if an emergency intervention can resolve housing crises.
2. Test a small-scale direct cash transfers project, giving 5 students $1000 to see if they are able to resolve their housing crisis
3. Get targeted school staff trained to access the AWHWA Centralized Diversion Fund which gives unaccompanied young people low barrier access to flexible funds to resolve homelessness/housing instability outside of the homeless system

Problem: When we looked at OSPI data from last year in comparison with our McKinney Vento Liaison's data from this year, we noticed that last year's number was almost double what it is this year.

- What are the current processes schools are using to identify unaccompanied homeless students?
- What do young people have to say about this data point?

Ideas we might test:
1. Work with students experiencing homelessness to identify homelessness red-flags that educators could notice via COVID, and produce a resource or training to test with one school to see if that increases identification over a 1-month period.
2. Partner with one McKinney Vento Liaison to get every student in one high school the McKinney Vento's contact info and the main homelessness system point of contact email directly, and see if that increases self-referrals.
3. Ask one McKinney Vento Liaison to cross-reference their currently identified students with the list of students who were identified last year, and do targeted outreach to check in on those students.
4. Ask one McKinney Vento Liaison to conduct a short presentation in homeroom informing students about what the program has to offer and how students can [safely] identify themselves to access support.

Problem: A McKinney Vento Liaison noticed that 60% of students on their list are youth of color, but service providers are seeing 85% of referrals from schools are for white young people

Questions this might bring up:
- How many young people of color on the McKinney Vento list have received disciplinary action as opposed to services?
- What are the policies around disciplinary action at x school district?
- What is the process and decision points for taking disciplinary action?
- Do the schools have any kind of intervention team? What does that look like?

Ideas we might test:
1. Have the intervention team start tracking the demographic data of the students they discuss, and demographics for who received what kind of intervention to identify a possible disparity. If one exists, try an intervention to mitigate it at the next intervention team meeting and see if it makes a difference.
2. Have one intervention team try getting a list of all the students disciplined in the last week and discussing those students at their weekly meeting along with their normal lists.
3. In one school, test a process of never disciplining a student without a conversation on their housing situation and support needs first.