



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

*Designating and Supporting
a Local Homeless Liaison:
A Guide for School District
Administrators in
Washington State*

2020

DESIGNATING AND SUPPORTING A LOCAL HOMELESS LIAISON

A Guide for School District Administrators in Washington State

2020

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INTRODUCTION

During the 2017–18 school year, school districts across the state of Washington reported 40,112 children and youth experiencing homelessness. This number comprised roughly 3.6% of the total K–12 school enrollment in the state (National Center for Homeless Education, 2020).

Homelessness results in devastating disruptions in a child’s or youth’s life and creates numerous educational barriers. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are often unable to attend school regularly and may lack basic needs and trauma support necessary for them to focus on schoolwork. These children and their families often lack access to vital services and resources.

Federal and state laws require local educational agencies (LEAs) and school districts to remove barriers to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. A key person for ensuring the success of these young people is the local homeless liaison (or local liaison) required by federal law in every school district. Furthermore, it is essential for school districts to appoint a qualified individual and provide the capacity and support for this person to effectively serve children and youth experiencing homelessness.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is a guide for school district administrators to use in appointing or hiring a local liaison. The document reviews the responsibilities of the local liaison as listed in federal and state law; lists suggested qualifications for the position; and discusses the experience, attitudes, and skills of effective local liaisons. In addition, the document includes ways school districts can support the local liaison to ensure they can effectively carry out the responsibilities of the position.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL LIAISON

The responsibilities of the local liaison, as specified in federal and state law, are many, varied, and complex. Because the duties are legislatively required, both the local liaison and the LEA, which oversees the implementation of federal and state education laws, are accountable for seeing that all responsibilities are carried out.

The McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act (Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act) is the federal law that ensures educational rights and services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The law requires every LEA or school district to appoint a local liaison to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and remove educational barriers for their success. A local liaison is required in all school districts, both those with and without McKinney-Vento subgrants.

The McKinney-Vento Act specifies the duties of the local liaison, which are summarized in the following list:

- Identifying children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Ensuring these children are enrolled in school and have a full and equal opportunity to

succeed in school.

- Ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness and their families have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible.
- Referring children and youth experiencing homelessness and their families to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services.
- Informing the parents or guardians of children and youth experiencing homelessness of the educational and related services available to their children and provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education.
- Posting public notice of the educational rights of children and youth experiencing homelessness in schools and other public places.
- Mediating enrollment disputes.
- Informing parents and guardians of children and youth experiencing homelessness and unaccompanied youth of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin.
- Ensuring that school personnel receive professional development related to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Ensuring that unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet state academic standards, and are informed of their status as independent students and providing verification documentation for the purposes of completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)]

See *Appendix A: Local Educational Agency Liaisons Duties Listed in the McKinney-Vento Act* for the exact language of the law.

Additionally, the McKinney-Vento Act requires local liaisons to coordinate with community programs and services to ensure (1) that all children and youth experiencing homelessness are promptly identified, (2) that these students have access to support services, and (3) that organizations and agencies are aware of the impact of homelessness on the children and youth they serve [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(5)]. The law specifically mentions local service agencies, housing agencies, Head Start, and agencies serving unaccompanied youth.

The law requires that local liaisons also connect with higher education institutions. Local liaisons not only have a role in verifying the "independent student status" for students who are unaccompanied and homeless to complete the FAFSA, but local liaisons can play an instrumental role in assisting colleges and universities in their region develop supports to help students experiencing homelessness transition from high school to college.

Other Relevant Federal Laws

Many of the programs and organizations with which the LEA homeless education program must coordinate and collaborate are governed by federal laws that specify the nature of the coordination to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness. See *Appendix B: Links to Federal Laws Related to Services for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness*.

State Laws

In 2016, the Washington State Legislature passed the Homeless Student Stability and Opportunity Act to amend state laws related to improving educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness through increased identification services, in-school supports, and housing stability. The Washington law complements the federal McKinney-Vento Act and reinforces the expectation that LEAs and local liaisons must address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

The local liaison serves an instrumental role in implementing the following state laws related to children and youth experiencing homelessness:

- [RCW 28A.320.192](#) (2017) requires school districts to award partial credit for work completed, waive specific courses required for graduation if similar coursework has been completed, and provide alternate means of acquiring credit to facilitate the graduation of students experiencing homelessness.
- [RCW 28A.300.542](#) and [RCW 28A.320.142](#) (2019) provides competitive grants to LEAs to identify students experiencing homelessness and increase the capacity of the LEAs to provide support to these students. In LEAs with the state grants, as well as those with McKinney-Vento subgrants, the local liaisons have additional duties to carry out the services proposed in the grant and meet reporting requirements. In addition, the bill requires every K–12 public school to establish a school building point of contact who will identify children and youth experiencing homelessness and connect them with the local liaison. The bill requires local liaisons to train the building points of contact.
- [RCW 28B.50.916](#) (2019) reinforces the role of colleges and universities in supporting students experiencing homeless.
- [RCW 7.70.065](#) (2020) authorizes school nurses, school counselors, or local liaisons to provide consent for non-emergency outpatient primary care services for unaccompanied students experiencing homelessness.

See *Appendix C: Links to State Laws and Policies Related to the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness* to review the actual language and details of the state laws.

SELECTING THE BEST PERSON FOR THE POSITION

The first step in ensuring that the local liaison will implement laws and policies to remove educational barriers for children and youth experiencing homelessness is to designate or hire the right person for the position. The right person must have the necessary experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to carry out their responsibilities.


Qualities of a Successful Local Liaison

Experience

Educational institutions are complex systems with a myriad of procedures, policies, and priorities. The local liaison should have experience working within the state or school district educational system in order to minimize the learning curve for understanding how the McKinney-Vento program is situated in the broader context of education. The individual considered for the position should also have experience in program coordination and in working with parents, children, and youth who are facing difficult circumstances.

Knowledge

The local liaison should understand the challenges faced by impoverished and homeless children, youth, and families, as well as the rights and services guaranteed to them in the McKinney-Vento Act and other federal and state laws and programs. The local liaison must have a clear understanding of the requirements of the position and of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and LEA systems in which these requirements will be enacted, such as the budgeting system and state student data collection system. In addition, an effective local liaison is one who is very familiar with community resources so that they can efficiently arrange services for needy students and their families. The local liaison should understand the impact of trauma on children and youth, such as the trauma of losing one's home, and have training in providing trauma-informed care.



"The position is unique in the education world as it is not solely focused on academics. The local liaison is a person who brings together the student, the family, the school, and the community to create a support network that is individualized and focused on creating stability and success."

– Sarah Miller, Spokane School District

Skills

The local liaison position requires a considerable set of professional skills. Clear oral and written communication is central to the work. The local liaison must provide leadership and guidance to administrators and staff in the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act in the form of professional development and technical assistance with case-specific situations.

In our data-driven world, the local liaison should be able to review and utilize data on homelessness, poverty, and school performance to inform the planning of services customized to the needs of the school district and children and youth.

The local liaison needs to be a good listener, giving voice to those who often feel unheard. Good listening also enables the local liaison to assess more accurately the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness and their families.

The local liaison will also need the ability to exercise diplomacy and good judgment in diffusing disagreements and resolving disputes between homeless parents or guardians and the school district over eligibility for McKinney-Vento services, school selection, or school enrollment.

In addition, skills in developing and maintaining collaborative relationships with community agencies will ensure that children and youth who are homeless are linked efficiently to needed services beyond what the school or LEA provides. And finally, the local liaison must be capable of managing multiple tasks and keeping organized and comprehensive records.

Attitude

Many school districts across the nation report that the one factor that makes the difference between a strong and weak homeless education program is having a local liaison with a heart for the position. Liaisons who are passionate about ensuring that children and youth experiencing homelessness are able to succeed in school will dedicate themselves to their work and do what is necessary to build trust with the children, youth, and families; navigate complex systems to get services in place; and inspire others to go above and beyond for the children and youth. They are not only administrators; they are advocates.

"Data are critical for providing evidence-based program improvement. For example, I track the origin of all referrals, which helps identify where to focus McKinney-Vento trainings and professional development."

– Roxana Parise, Bellingham School District

"Sometimes families just need to feel heard and encouraged. Letting them know that they are taking the correct steps to find a way out of homelessness gives them a positive outlook on what's to come."

– Yesenia Chavez, Kennewick School District

In evaluating the appropriateness of a candidate for the position, determining the person’s perspectives on children and youth who are homeless, impoverished, or at risk is essential. It is critical for the individual to believe that:

- At-risk children have great potential, should be held to high expectations, and deserve support to succeed.
- Decisions related to children and youth experiencing homelessness should be child-centered, keeping their best interest as the highest priority.
- Services provided to vulnerable students, such as children and youth experiencing homelessness, may need to extend beyond what is provided for other children and youth when necessary.
- Compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act and other laws that ensure rights and services for children and youth experiencing homelessness is paramount.
- Cross-program collaboration creates a coordinated and comprehensive approach to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness.



“An exemplary local liaison is strong and persistent at systemic change and also gentle enough to make genuine connections with students experiencing homelessness and their families.”
 – Gail LaVassar and Mary Mitchell,
 South Whidbey School District

See *Appendix D: Local Liaison Qualifications Checklist* for more information. The checklist may be used as a tool to assist in determining if the person under consideration is appropriate for the position.

Role Groups to Consider for the Position of Local Liaison

The local liaison must be an employee of the school district. The position is frequently assigned to an existing staff person or administrator. There are several role groups that are well suited for the position, and several that are not.

Table 1 below lists the types of role groups to consider for the local liaison and includes the advantages and disadvantages of each one. Note that there may be exceptions, based on the qualifications of the person, but good practice suggests reviewing carefully the current responsibilities of the person under consideration for the position to ensure that they will have sufficient time, experience, and authority to carry out all local liaison responsibilities and will not have any conflicts of interest in identifying and serving homeless students.

Table 1: Role Groups to Consider

Role Group	Advantages	Disadvantages
Federal programs administrator	Familiarity with other programs that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness; understanding of how federal	May have other job responsibilities that impact time to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness; may

Role Group	Advantages	Disadvantages
	programs operate; can facilitate coordination across programs; may have enough authority from an administrator's position.	not have background in working with at-risk students, such as those experiencing homelessness.
School social worker, school counselor	Background in dealing with families, children, and youth who are homeless or at-risk; familiarity with trauma informed care.	May lack the authority to enforce the law; may not have background in educational strategies.
Educator	Background in academic strategies to increase school success of students experiencing homelessness.	May lack the authority to enforce the law; may not have background in working with students who are at-risk, such as those experiencing homelessness.
Superintendent, assistant superintendent	Has authority to implement the law.	May have other job responsibilities that could interfere with time needed to serve students experiencing homelessness; may not have direct experience in addressing the needs of at-risk students, such as those experiencing homelessness; possible conflict of interest in identifying children who require significant LEA resources to serve.
Pupil transportation director	Knows the policies, procedures, and strategies for arranging transportation for students experiencing homelessness; has administrative skills.	May lack background and experience in working with students who are homeless and linking them to educational and other services; may lack authority to enforce the law; possible conflict of interest in making school selection decisions where serving the best interest of the student may require significant pupil transportation funds.
School secretary, support staff	Knowledge of school operations and resources; may have direct experience and insight into	May lack background in social work or education for identifying and addressing needs of at-risk students; may lack sufficient

Role Group	Advantages	Disadvantages
	working with students experiencing homelessness.	authority or standing to require professional staff and administrators to implement the law.

Role groups most appropriate for the position are those that require experience in education, counseling, and/or social services. This type of experience is essential to help identify needs and appropriate services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. The main challenges for school social workers, counselors, and educators serving as local liaisons stem from not having sufficient authority to enforce the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act. School districts should address these challenges by establishing and implementing policies and procedures to ensure commitment to and accountability for carrying out the law among all school and school district staff and administrators.

Having a superintendent or assistant superintendent serve as the local liaison is strongly discouraged. While high-level administrators may have the authority to enforce the law, they generally have full plates in overseeing the entire district and do not have sufficient time to devote to the many tasks required of the local liaison. Moreover, these individuals, along with pupil transportation directors, may feel pressed at some point to choose between implementing services for students experiencing homelessness that come at significant cost to the school district and allocating resources that fit within budgetary priorities, thus creating a conflict of interest.

The LEA also should not assign the position of local liaison to a role group that lacks sufficient experience to identify appropriate services or authority to enforce the law. School secretaries and support staff, for example, quite frequently have great compassion for children and youth experiencing homelessness, but they may not be able to effectively enforce compliance regarding the rights and services to which these students are legally entitled.

A PROCESS FOR DESIGNATING A LOCAL LIAISON

In most cases, the local liaison position is assigned to an existing administrator or staff member. In some cases, an LEA will hire someone for the position. Regardless of how the district fills the position, there should be a formal process to review and document the appropriateness of the candidate under consideration. LEAs are encouraged to develop a job description that includes qualifications, required duties, and time allocated to the position. See *Appendix E: Sample Local Liaison Position Description* for more information.

LEA administrators should not merely assign someone to carry out the position of the local liaison, especially if that person already has a full plate. The local liaison should be considered a professional position, and the person who fills the position should have the needed qualifications, time, and desire to carry out the required responsibilities.

CREATING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE LOCAL LIAISON'S SUCCESS

While getting the right person for the position of local liaison is essential, ensuring that person can work under conditions in which they can be successful is equally critical. Time, training, and supportive working conditions are essential to enabling the local liaison to perform their work in an optimal way.

Time

One of the most common complaints among local liaisons is that they feel they do not have sufficient time to carry out their responsibilities to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness. Administrators should review the legal requirements for the local liaison position along with the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness that the school district typically serves in a year and allocate sufficient time for the position to ensure that the local liaison can do their job effectively. Administrators may wish to discuss the time allocation with former local liaisons in the LEA, local liaisons from other LEAs, or the State Coordinator for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program to determine what is realistic.

Authority

Local liaisons often feel that they do not have the authority they need to enforce the law. When school staff or administrators are resistant, local liaisons need to know that the administration will support them and hold others accountable for compliance.

Training and Technical Assistance

A wealth of knowledge exists to assist local liaisons with understanding the responsibilities of their position and implementing policies and services for children and youth experiencing homelessness. Administrators should encourage local liaisons to attend all trainings offered by the OSPI EHCY program and should make them aware of national conferences and training resources, such as those provided by the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), Schoolhouse Connection (SHC), and the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY). See *Appendix F: Training and Technical Assistance Resources for Local Liaisons* for a description of resources offered through these national organizations.

The Washington State Coordinator is a key resource for local liaisons. The State Coordinator provides trainings and updates on laws and policies. In addition, the State Coordinator provides assistance with case-specific situations to help local liaisons understand nuances of the law and effective ways to address LEA-level challenges with serving children and youth experiencing homelessness. The school district should encourage the local liaison to contact the State Coordinator for assistance, as needed. See *Appendix F: Training and Technical Assistance Resources for Local Liaisons* for contact information for the Washington State Coordinator.

The school district should have a plan in place to maintain the continuity of the McKinney-Vento program when transitioning to a new local liaison. There should be more than one person in the LEA who is familiar with the program and can bring the new local liaison up to speed on the specific features of the program. In addition, the school district should maintain easily accessible

documents and files that the new local liaison can review. See *Appendix G: Suggested Documents and Files Available for Local Liaison Review*.


Connection to Other LEA Programs

Many programs in the LEA serve children and youth experiencing homelessness, such as pupil transportation, child nutrition, preschool, Title IA, Title III, migrant education, and special education. The local liaison should be part of the overall administrative team so that they can assess the needs of students experiencing homelessness in the school district and ensure that services across programs are consistent and comprehensive. Administrators should encourage all program administrators, including the local liaison, to coordinate services for students experiencing homelessness. Periodic cross-program meetings and joint trainings are effective ways to ensure that the needs of students who are homeless are considered in all programs.

Self-Care and Secondary Trauma Support

Local liaisons in their continual work with children, youth, and families who are experiencing crises and trauma can suffer from burnout and secondary trauma over time. LEAs should provide resources and respite opportunities to help local liaisons manage the personal mental health challenges their position can create.

A supportive supervisor is critical to help the local liaison maintain professional boundaries and avoid becoming overwhelmed. A supportive supervisor should be familiar with the McKinney-Vento program, stay abreast of emerging issues, schedule regular meetings with the local liaison, and advocate for the program's goals.



"As a liaison, I like to listen to the situation that my students and families are in so that I can empower them by providing them with the information that they could use to help navigate the systems we have set up to help them."

– Yesenia Chavez, Kennewick School District

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR SELECTING LOCAL LIAISONS

LEA administrators in every school district must appoint a local liaison to implement the McKinney-Vento Act and state laws related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. A qualified and committed local liaison will ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified and provided the services they need to be successful in school. The recommendations below summarize key points to consider when selecting the right person to carry out the responsibilities of the local liaison position:

1. LEA administrators should be familiar with all the requirements of the local liaison position as specified in the McKinney-Vento Act, other federal laws, and Washington state law.
2. The local liaison should possess the appropriate experience, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to carry out the responsibilities of the position effectively.

3. A liaison who is passionate about serving homeless children and youth is key in implementing the program successfully.
4. The LEA should have a formal process for selecting the best candidate for the local liaison position.
5. LEA administrators are responsible for ensuring that the local liaison has enough time, training, authority, and support to carry out their duties.
6. The State Coordinator is a key contact to assist the local liaison in understanding the role and carrying out the duties of the position.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- National Center for Homeless Education. *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*. 2017. Retrieved from <https://nche.ed.gov/homeless-liaison-toolkit/>
- National Center for Homeless Education. 2020. Washington State Level Data and Contact Information. Retrieved from <http://profiles.nche.seiservices.com/StateProfile.aspx?StateID=56>
- The McKinney-Vento Act: Education for Homeless Children and Youths, Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (42 U.S.C. Chapter 119, Subchapter VI, Part B: Education for Homeless Children and Youths §§ 11431-11435), 2015. Retrieved from <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title42/chapter119/subchapter6/partB&edition=prelim>
- U.S. Department of Education. 2016. *Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program: Non-regulatory Guidance*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716.pdf>

This document was produced by Ms. Diana Bowman, former director of the National Center for Homeless Education, in July 2020.

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Yesenia Chavez, Kennewick School District
Gail LaVassar, South Whidbey School District
Sarah Miller, Spokane School District
Mary Mitchell, South Whidbey School District
Roxana Parise, Bellingham School District

Some comments from these local liaisons were included in text boxes in the document. To read their comments in full, see *Appendix H: In Their Own Voices—Washington Local Liaisons Comment on Their Work*.

APPENDIX A: LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY LIAISON DUTIES LISTED IN THE MCKINNEY-VENTO ACT

Each local educational agency liaison for homeless children and youths, designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), shall ensure that:

- (i) homeless children and youths are identified by school personnel through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- (ii) homeless children and youths are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, school of that local educational agency;
- (iii) homeless families and homeless children and youths have access to and receive educational services for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including services through Head Start programs (including Early Head Start programs) under the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C 9831 et seq.), early intervention services under part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S. C. 1431 et seq.), and other preschool programs administered by the local educational agency;
- (iv) homeless families and homeless children and youths receive referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health and substance abuse services, housing services, and other appropriate services;
- (v) the parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- (vi) public notice of the educational rights of homeless children and youths is disseminated in locations frequented by parents or guardians of such children and youths, and unaccompanied youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians of homeless children and youths, and unaccompanied youths;
- (vii) enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with paragraph (3)(E);
- (viii) the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth, and any unaccompanied youth, is fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to the school of origin, as described in paragraph (1)(J)(iii), and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school of origin, as described in paragraph (1)(J)(iii), and is assisted in accessing transportation to the school that is selected under paragraph (3)(A);
- (ix) school personnel providing services under this part receive professional development and other support; and
- (x) unaccompanied youths –
 - (I) are enrolled in school;
 - (II) have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as the State establishes for other children and youth, including through implementation of the procedures under paragraph (1)(F)(ii); and
 - (III) are informed of their status as independent students under section 1087vv of title 20 and that the youths may obtain assistance from the local educational agency liaison to receive verification of such status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid described in section 1090 of title 20. [42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(6)(A)]

APPENDIX B: FEDERAL LAWS RELATED TO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- [Title I, Part A \(20 U.S.C. 6311 et seq.\)](#)
- [Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act](#)
- [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act](#)
- [Higher Education Opportunity Act of 1965](#) (See 20 U.S.C. §1087vv—Definition of Independent Student)
- [HEARTH Act of 2009](#)
- [The Head Start Act](#) as amended by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007
- [The McKinney-Vento Act: Education for Homeless Children and Youths](#) *Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (42 U.S.C. Chapter 119, Subchapter VI, Part B: Education for Homeless Children and Youths §§ 11431-11435)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Act](#)
- [Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act](#) reauthorized by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

The National Center for Homeless Education's [Homeless Liaison Toolkit](#) (Chapter 16) describes ways that the federal laws listed above impact services for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

APPENDIX C: LINKS TO STATE LAWS AND POLICIES RELATED TO THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Increased Services for Students Experiencing Homelessness and the Appointment of a Homeless Point of Contact in Every School Building:

[RCW 28A.300.542](#) and [RCW 28A.320.142](#). 2019. The law provides competitive grants to LEAs to identify students experiencing homelessness and increase the capacity of the LEA to provide support to these students. In LEAs with the state grants, as well as those with McKinney-Vento subgrants, the local liaisons have additional duties to carry out the services proposed in the grant and meet reporting requirements.

Section 3 of the bill requires all principals to appoint school-building points of contact to identify students experiencing homelessness and connect them to the local liaison. The local liaison is responsible for training the school-building points of contact.

Awarding Partial Credit and Waivers for Students Experiencing Homelessness, in Foster Care, and Others:

[RCW 28A.320.192](#). 2017. Homeless and Dependent Youth—School District Procedures requires that school districts to award partial credit, alternate ways of earning credit, and waivers of credit to facilitate the graduation of students experiencing homelessness.

Support for College Students Who Experienced Homelessness When They Graduated from High School:

[RCW 28B.50.916](#). 2019. Homeless College Students—Pilot Program provides funds to four college districts to support students experiencing homelessness and to students in the foster care system when they graduated from high school.

Who May Provide Informed Consent to Healthcare for Unaccompanied Minors Experiencing Homelessness:

[RCW 7.70.065 \[\(2\)\(b\)\(i\)\(B\)\]](#). 2020. Provision allows informed consent for health care for youth who are experiencing homelessness and who are under the age of majority to be obtained from a school nurse, school counselor, or homeless student liaison. See [Sample Forms](#)—then scroll down to find the form.

APPENDIX D: LOCAL LIAISON QUALIFICATIONS CHECKLIST

Rate the applicant for the local liaison position on each of the following items from 5-0, with 5 being highly qualified to 0 being no qualifications.

	Experience
	Program coordination
	Working with students experiencing homelessness or other at-risk students
	Working in the school system as a teacher, administrator, counselor, or social worker
	Analyzing and using data
	Working with parents
	Cross-program or cross-agency collaboration
	Total (30 points maximum)
	Knowledge
	Homelessness and its challenges for families, children, and youth
	The impact of trauma on children and youth
	The McKinney-Vento Act and other federal laws impacting the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness
	State laws and policies related to children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Responsibilities of the LEA and local liaison to serve children and youth experiencing homelessness
	LEA, state, and federal programs that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness
	Community resources for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness
	LEA budgeting system
	OSPI data collection system
	Total (45 points maximum)
	Skills
	Communicating clearly orally and in writing
	Developing clear and effective procedures and protocols related to homeless students' school enrollment, transportation, and referrals to services
	Providing trauma-informed services
	Establishing trust and communication with children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness
	Demonstrating leadership in enforcing the law and communicating clear expectations for school and LEA staff and administrators
	Preventing and resolving disputes
	Organizing and managing multiple tasks
	Keeping clear records
	Training and professional development
	Initiating and maintaining collaborative relationships with LEA and community programs and services
	Total (50 points maximum)

	Attitudes and Values
	At-risk children have great potential, should be held to high expectations, and deserve support to succeed.
	Decisions should be child-centered determinations, focusing on the best interest of each individual child.
	Services provided to vulnerable students may need to extend beyond what is provided for other children and youth when necessary.
	Children and youth experiencing homelessness should be protected under the rights and services ensured in the McKinney-Vento Act.
	Cross-program collaboration creates a coordinated and comprehensive approach to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness.
	Total (25 points maximum)

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE LOCAL LIAISON POSITION DESCRIPTION

Position: Title I Specialist/McKinney-Vento Liaison **Location:** Education Center **Employment Term:** Full-time—12 months

QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in education or social work required
- 5–7 years teaching and/or counseling experience
- Strong oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills
- Possession of, or ability to obtain, a valid state education or instruction specialist certification
- 3 years of administrative responsibility preferred
- Previous experience working in a Title I program or school preferred
- Bilingual in Spanish preferred
- Familiarity with the state and/or district data collection system

RESPONSIBILITIES

- Reviews and revises policies and procedures to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are enrolled in school and receive educational services.
- Provides training and professional development to district and school staff about the educational rights and needs of students experiencing homelessness.
- Works collaboratively with schools and administrative offices to provide technical and compliance support related to the McKinney-Vento Act.
- Works with parents and students experiencing homelessness to provide educational support.
- Prepares and submits reports to the state education department.
- Maintains records and documentation for district monitoring by the state Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program.
- Ensures that data on students experiencing homelessness are collected by the district and submitted to the state education department.
- Responds to and resolves difficult and sensitive inquiries and complaints regarding McKinney-Vento compliance.
- Collaborates with community agencies providing services to families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness, as needed.
- Participates in professional development activities on an annual basis.

Adapted from the NCHE brief "[Local Homeless Education Liaisons: Making the Right Selection and Supporting Their Effectiveness](#)" Appendix C.

APPENDIX F: TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES FOR LOCAL LIAISONS

State Resources

Ms. Melinda Dyer, Supervisor
Education of Homeless Children & Youth
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
Old Capitol Building, P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200
Phone: 360-725-6505
Email: melinda.dyer@k12.wa.us

Website: [Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction EHCY Program](#)

National Resources

National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)

[The National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\)](#) is the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. NCHE provides a comprehensive website, webinars, onsite trainings, and publications that are updated regularly. Updates, announcements, and links to resources are also provided via an NCHE hosted listserv. Assistance with understanding and implementing the law is provided to parents, caregivers, and those who serve children and youth experiencing homelessness via a Helpline (800-308-2145 or homeless@serve.org).

NCHE's [Homeless Liaison Toolkit](#) is a comprehensive resource to help local liaisons understand the laws that serve children and youth experiencing homelessness and learn effective strategies for implementation.

Schoolhouse Connection (SHC)

[SchoolHouse Connection \(SHC\)](#) is a national non-profit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. SHC provides advocacy, training, and assistance with partnerships with early childhood programs, schools, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth. SHC provides webinars, resources and publications along with a comprehensive website that includes an active Q&A feature. SHC offers college scholarships through the SchoolHouse Connection Youth Leadership and Scholarship Program which provides scholarships to youth who have experienced homelessness to ensure their completion of a post-secondary education program.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY)

[The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth \(NAEHCY\)](#) is a membership organization that provides resources to remove educational barriers for children and

youth experiencing homelessness. NAEHCY offers an annual homeless education conference which brings practitioners, including State Coordinators, local liaisons, shelter and service providers, researchers, and advocates together to learn and network.

APPENDIX G: SUGGESTED DOCUMENTS AND FILES AVAILABLE FOR LOCAL LIAISON REVIEW

The following list of documents and files should be made available for new local liaisons to review. In addition, the LEA should include as part of the responsibilities for the position the expectation that the local liaison will maintain all program and related files and documents in an organized and easily accessible format.

Contact Information

- Contact information for LEA program administrators (Title I, special education, dropout prevention, pupil transportation, early childhood, and child nutrition)
- Contact information for community partners
- Contact information for school building-level homeless points of contact
- Contact information for the State Coordinator for the EHCY program
- Contact information for national organizations (See *Appendix F*)

Compliance Information

- Federal laws related to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness (The McKinney-Vento Act and other laws mentioned in *Appendix B*)
- State and LEA laws and policies related to serving children and youth experiencing homelessness (See *Appendix C*)
- State and LEA dispute resolution policy for the EHCY program
- EHCY monitoring reports
- Local school board policies

LEA EHCY Program Information

- Consolidated State Performance Report/*EDFacts* data
- McKinney-Vento subgrant application and records
- State subgrant application and records
- Program expenditures
- Title I homeless set aside amount and expenditures
- Records of disputes over enrollment, eligibility, and school selection
- Phone and email logs for interactions with parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth

Tools, Forms, and Templates

- School year calendar
- Professional development opportunities (local, state, and national)
- Sample forms and templates (e.g., written notice for disputes, enrollment residency form, medical consent for unaccompanied underage youth experiencing homelessness, FAFSA application verification form)

APPENDIX H: IN THEIR OWN VOICES— WASHINGTON LOCAL LIAISONS COMMENT ON THEIR WORK

Experienced local liaisons from several Washington school districts were invited to respond to questions related to their work. Their responses provide further insight into what empowers and supports the work of the local liaison.

1. What do you think are the most important qualifications (e.g., experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes) for an effective local homeless liaison?
 - The liaison should be someone that has an understanding of the community service providers that the school district is in, is able to analyze data to identify areas that need additional support, someone that can read and understand the law while applying it in a manner that the local district finds meaningful, can work as part of a multi-disciplinary team to support students, and so much more.
 - Empathy is essential along with knowledge of the law, confidence, and strong advocacy skills. The job requires being able to tell a resistant principal or superintendent that the unaccompanied youth who is considered a runaway youth, must be enrolled immediately.
 - The local liaison needs to be willing and able to recognize the strengths of homeless students and their families, rather than only to focus on deficits.
 - The job of local liaison encompasses a wide range of knowledge and skills. If I were to choose one skill above all others it would be “professional boundaries.” Local liaisons often work with students and families in crisis and it is difficult to keep boundaries in place so that our work life doesn’t cross over into our personal life. It is extremely difficult to walk away from work at the end of the day, knowing there’s nothing we can do to prevent a family from spending the night in their car, tent, or on the streets. That is when it is tempting to ignore professional training and offer to pay for a motel room out of our own personal finances. Secondary trauma stress can take a toll on a local liaison, especially if they have difficulties maintaining professional boundaries.
 - The most important qualification that a local liaison can have is the ability to be flexible! Flexible in their practices, the manner of learning, and finding flexible ways to support those they serve.
 - As local liaisons, it is our duty to learn about the community in which we work and serve. Then, we must apply that information in the most effective manner, adjusting our practices to successfully engage in policy and service delivery that allows students experiencing homelessness to thrive.
 - The most important qualifications include experience and knowledge of resources in your community. As a local liaison, you want to become familiar with your community and build relationships with organizations that could assist in helping students and families.

2. What process do you think an LEA should use to appoint or hire a local homeless liaison?

- The local liaison position is often partnered with other positions in order to support a full-time person. This complicates the liaison's work and can stretch him or her too thin at times.
- The hiring should be done with this specific job in mind, not just attaching it to another position out of convenience.
- An LEA should have an open application process to find an individual who is organized, articulate, and a quick learner who is passionate about leveling the playing field for homeless students and their families.
- The LEA should put together a team of people who have knowledge of the role of the McKinney-Vento liaison. That team should help with appointing the local homeless liaison and should be able to pick-up on the skills needed in a person in order to fill the liaison position successfully.
- Every district's homeless support program looks a little different, based on district size and needs. Before hiring a local liaison, a district should first identify program goals and objectives, and then hire the best candidate who can achieve those goals.

3. What attitude empowers you to do your work? What makes a local liaison exemplary?

- The attitude I choose to take into work every day is a positive attitude and an attitude of comprehension and compassion for the students and families struggling with homelessness.
- A local liaison is exemplary when they can assist these students and families by listening to their challenges and helping them find solutions, whether that be solutions provided within the school district for the student or community resources for the family as a whole. As a liaison I like to listen to the situation that my students and families are in so that I can empower them by providing them with information that they could use to help navigate the systems we have set up to help them. Sometimes families just need to feel heard and encouraged, letting them know that they are taking the correct steps to find a way out of homelessness gives them a positive outlook on what's to come.
- A local liaison should have a can-do attitude to make a positive difference in people's lives.
- A local liaison should have commitment to upholding mutual respect and believing in people's ability to overcome difficult situations.
- A local liaison should find solutions through listening.
- A local liaison should have the ability to walk alongside a youth or family and support them on their path without jumping in and doing all the work for them; the ability to know when a family/youth is ready for another step and help them make that step; and the ability to do the work on occasion when a family or youth is stuck and to step back at other times and let everyone take a break.
- An exemplary local liaison is strong and persistent at implementing systemic change and also gentle enough to make genuine connections with homeless students and their families. Of course, that person then also needs to document and track all the work!

- A willingness to do work that is outside the norm for a school district to do is what can make a local liaison extraordinary. This position is unique in the education world as it is not solely focused on academics. The local liaison is a person who brings together the student, the family, the school, and the community to create a support network that is individualized and focused on creating stability and success.
- A local liaison should be a great listener, great communicator, and a great problem solver. When a local liaison talks about the work, their love for the students should be obvious.

4. How important is using data in helping you identify homeless students and plan your work?

- Using data is very important. Not only do we need to know how many students are homeless, their situation, and if they are on their own with a parent, we need to know if the supports we are providing are effective. Knowing the number of students, their individual barriers, and their level of academic performance is necessary for district-wide planning and for individual student plans.
- Using data allows our district to design a service delivery plan in a manner that supports the highest areas of need. Data allow us to know if we are identifying students of all backgrounds, in all schools, and at all grade levels in an equitable manner. Data allow us to know where to have additional supports throughout our district (typically personnel) in order to reach students in an efficient manner. Data also tell us what areas of support our students are in need of: do they have a difficult time with regular attendance, are they failing consistently in one area of school, do the students consistently need PE clothing or some other tangible item? Using data to answer questions about who, when, why allows us to better address the needs we see each day in our work.
- We have to be able to collect data from our schools in order to continue identifying students in our district. Data can be a driver in this position. It is not always easy to contact every person in your district who has completed a questionnaire that could possibly qualify a child or youth for McKinney-Vento protections. Having people in your department who are willing to step in and help is huge. In a larger district the number of students that need assistance may be very high and you will see the number of questionnaires increase very fast. Based on the questionnaires, I can definitely determine when the number of identified students feels too low.
- Keeping an organized system to help you manage the number of students you have identified is crucial.
- I try to identify more students than the prior year based on the data we collected the year before. With the number of students increasing in our district, the data enable me to determine if the number of homeless students is increasing as well.
- Using data is critical in providing evidence-based program improvement. For example, I track the origin of all referrals, which helps identify where to focus McKinney-Vento trainings and professional development. Another example are student needs assessments, which give us the data needed to identify agency partnerships. When 90% of our unaccompanied youth identified food deficiency as one of their top needs, we partnered with a local nonprofit to provide a food pantry at each high school.

- Providing data is a great way to communicate program needs and accomplishments to district administrators, community agencies, and the local government.

5. What are the most important types of support that school districts should provide to local liaisons to help them carry out their responsibilities?

- School districts can show support by allocating enough time to do the job and giving local liaisons the authority to identify and advocate for services.
- Local liaisons should be allowed enough time to carry out their duties, as well as to receive assistance from others in their department in order to help the identification process. In most cases liaisons are not full-time liaisons, but the job can be a full-time job, which can present its own set of challenges.
- The local liaison position is an all-encompassing job. The local liaison is in constant communication with members of the community, students and families experiencing homelessness, school staff, administrators. There is potential for great work to be done, but there also potential for great harm if the local liaison does not have sufficient support.
- Every local liaison needs a supervising administrator that understands the McKinney-Vento Act, respects the local liaison's knowledge, and advocates for the program's goals and objects.
- School districts should include the local liaison in building-level meetings where students who are homeless are being discussed.
- The most important types of support that a school district can provide is to include the local liaison in the overall administrative team. That way the local liaison can better assess the needs of the district and better design a support model for homeless students to fit the students' and district's needs.
- It is key that the local liaison have opportunities to provide professional development to all types of employees on a consistent basis.
- Local liaisons need space, resources, and trust in order to successfully do the work that the state and federal law requires districts to complete.

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