

Vermont ARP-HCY State Plan

As a condition of receiving an allocation under the American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth program (ARP-HCY), each state's Chief State School Officer must submit a plan that contains the following information:

For ARP Homeless I:

- 1. How the SEA has used or will use up to 25 percent of funds awarded under ARP Homeless I for State-level activities to provide training, technical assistance, capacity-building, and engagement at the State and LEA levels, including support to LEAs to increase access to summer programming in 2021? This must include how the SEA has supported LEAs to plan for and provide wrap-around services, in collaboration with State and local agencies for immediate needs this spring 2021, and how it will support LEAs for school year 2021-2022. This should include the extent to which the SEA has or plans to build capacity in LEAs that have not received an EHCY subgrant in the past in order to ensure that these LEAs are well-prepared to utilize the funds provided in ARP Homeless II;*

Using funds available to the SEA under ARP-HCY Homeless I, ARP-HCY Homeless II, and McKinney-Vento, the Vermont Agency of Education plans to initiate a number of projects intended to strengthen local capacity to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness. We recognize the complex impacts that the pandemic has had on state and regional economies, family dynamics, and school system operations, creating additional urgency to engage with this very vulnerable population while also complicating local efforts to do so. Coupled with the historically limited capacity and regular turnover of homeless liaisons in our relatively small local school systems, we have identified augmenting state efforts to provide training and resources to LEAs and community partners around the identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth, best practices in meeting unique needs, and essential regional partnerships, as top priorities.

The Agency of Education intends to put out to bid contracts to address the following identified needs:

- A public outreach campaign concerning student eligibility and rights for services when experiencing homeless, including marketing materials made available to LEAs, state and community partners across Vermont, such as ready-made posters and brochures.
- On-demand videos/training modules and a Vermont-specific liaison's handbook to support the timely training of LEA staff and community partners on best practices in identification, enrollment, services, rights and dispute resolution processes, and available resources.
- Tools to connect LEAs and individuals experiencing homelessness or at-risk to become homeless with regional and local housing and community resources, such as a regularly updated clearinghouse/virtual inventory of available service providers.
- Approaches to increase the access of families experiencing homelessness to early childhood supports and resources.

In support of reengagement and programming for all students in summer of 2021, the Vermont Agency of Education in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Governor Phil Scott's office and the office of Senator Bernie Sanders, created the Summer Matters for All grant program. Awards were made in May of 2021 with purposes of:

- Creating new summer learning programs in areas where few or no services currently exist;
- Expanding existing summer learning programs in order to increase affordability for K-12 children and youth through a variety of strategies;
- Increasing access to summer programs for children and youth from traditionally marginalized populations, including children experiencing homelessness;
- Eliminating barriers to summer program access based on geography, socio-economic factors, demographics.

Ultimately, 93 projects were funded with awards totaling \$3.85 million, creating 31,650 new summer program slots over the course of the summer and leading to a total of 238 new weeks of summer programming. While, due to the timing of these funds release, ARP-HCY funds were not included in this effort, they may be utilized for similar future efforts, both statewide and locally.

In addition to the projects described above, the Vermont Agency of Education has taken a number of steps to build capacity in Vermont's LEAs to effectively apply for and utilize available federal funds and to provide wrap-around services to vulnerable students. These efforts have included more frequent communications and trainings hosted by the State Coordinator for Homeless Education, including trainings specific to applying for ARP Homeless I and II funds, with emphases on allowable uses, summer programming, partnering with community service providers, and coordination of funds with other available resources. Applications for ARP Homeless I and II funds were designed in collaboration with the State Coordinator for Homeless Education for simplicity and to support understanding for new LEA applicants. Additionally, the Agency of Education's COVID-19 Federal Emergency Funds Project Manager ensured coordination of communication regarding allowable uses and requirements of ARP-HCY and ESSER funds. Brief guidance documents summarizing available funds and their uses have been released to the field. A training hosted by the State Coordinator in September will include sessions from state housing agencies, Head Start, and the state's Migrant Education Program to support a wrap-around approach to serving students experiencing homelessness.

In addition, in June of 2021, Act 67, referred to as the Community Schools Act, was signed into law, reflecting an understanding that as Vermont's LEAs engage in COVID recovery and ongoing innovation efforts, community schools may be an effective model in supporting the unique achievement and well-being needs of each student. Among other ways, community schools are characterized by the provision of integrated, wrap-around supports. Included in this Act is a competitive grant for LEAs, funded by ARP-ESSER, intended to provide funding to support implementation of activities within a community schools model. Awards will be made by September 1, 2021. These efforts will undoubtedly have a profound effect on LEA and school capacity to meet the many diverse needs of students and families in school year 2021-2022 and beyond, particularly those most vulnerable and with sometimes limited access to resources.

2. *How the SEA has used or will use their funds for State-level activities to provide support to LEAs to increase access to summer programming and plan for and provide wraparound services for summer 2021, in collaboration with State and local agencies and other community-based organizations;*

See response to first prompt. While the timing of the arrival of the extremely valuable ARP-HCY funds made utilizing them thoughtfully in the summer of 2021 challenging, the Vermont Agency of Education has partnered with the Agency of Human Services, the Governor's office, the office of Senator Bernie Sanders, the state legislature, LEAs, and local providers to address expressed intents of these funds, namely providing greater access to summer programming and wrap-around services. These initiatives are currently supported using other sources of federal COVID-response funds; however, in school year 2021-2022 and in years to come, uses of both state and local ARP-HCY funds will support the intents of this work around re-engagement and recovery, specifically as they apply to students experiencing homeless.

3. *How the SEA has used or will use at least 75 percent of funds awarded under ARP Homeless I for distribution to LEAs in accordance with all requirements of EHCY. This must include the extent to which the SEA has or will use funds to supplement existing EHCY subgrants to allow for more rapid fund distribution to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness, and the extent to which the SEA analyzed and reviewed where there are significant concentrations of students and families experiencing homelessness across the State (including in LEAs that are not existing EHCY subgrantees), and how it has or will ensure that supports from ARP Homeless I can urgently reach them.*

As required, the Vermont Agency of Education made ARP Homeless I awards competitively as described in the McKinney-Vento Act. A streamlined digital ARP Homeless I application, based on Vermont's digital McKinney-Vento application, was created that met all applicant narrative requirements. Applications included information on total student population within the LEA, as well as the number of identified homeless children and youth, allowing grant application reviewers to assess higher concentrations of students experiencing homelessness across applicants. A multi-person process for reviewing applications and selecting awardees that mirrored the process in Vermont for awarding McKinney-Vento funds was used.

Vermont elected to use a new competitive application for awarding ARP Homeless I funds, as permitted by statute, rather than supplementing existing McKinney-Vento awards. This allowed us to be appropriately responsive to LEAs that may not have applied for awards in the past but, possibly influenced by the pandemic, now found themselves in need of additional resources for their students experiencing homelessness. As a rural state, Vermont's population of students and families experiencing homelessness is often highly mobile, given the many areas within the state with limited housing and resources; the movements of a handful of families can represent a meaningful change to the need for resources available to schools and LEAs to support this population in a region. Additionally, some of our McKinney-Vento awardees from the past fiscal year carried significant unspent balances of funds, likely also attributable to COVID, which gave us pause in automatically awarding them additional funds for similar purposes.

For ARP Homeless II:

- 1. How the SEA will use up to 25 percent of funds awarded under ARP Homeless II for State-level activities to provide training, technical assistance, capacity-building, and engagement at the State and LEA levels, including support to LEAs to plan for and provide wrap-around services, in collaboration with State and local agencies, for school year 2021-2022; and*

The Vermont Agency of Education plans to initiate a number of projects intended on strengthening local capacity to identify and serve students experiencing homelessness. See response to first prompt for identified priorities for third party sub-grants and contracts to these ends. Additionally, intents and authorized funding under Act 67, also described above, represent momentum towards a statewide model to serve all students through community schooling, a model that embraces wrap-around approaches. We envision supplementing these efforts, specifically for students experiencing homeless, with state level funds under ARP-HCY II.

- 2. How the SEA will use at least 75 percent of funds awarded under ARP Homeless II for distribution to LEAs in accordance with the final requirements. This must include a description of how the SEA will distribute funds in accordance with the required formula to address the needs of students experiencing homelessness and the extent to which the SEA has encouraged or will encourage the creation of consortia for those LEAs that may not meet the required minimum formula amount.*

In accordance with final requirements for the distribution of ARP Homeless II funds, the Vermont Agency of Education will make allocations by applying the greater of each LEA's 2018-2019 or 2019-2020 count of students experiencing homelessness to a statewide proportional distribution of 50% of funds to be sub-granted, and by applying each LEA's proportion of 2020-2021 Title I Part A funds sub-granted statewide to the other 50%. LEAs with an allocation of less than \$5000 after these two parts are combined will be encouraged to form a consortium with other LEAs that do not meet this required minimum. Messaging about the need and mechanisms to form, and benefits of forming, a consortium will occur on several fronts: in brief introductory guidance already drafted by the State Coordinator of Homeless Education, in weekly email messaging to superintendents announcing the availability of these funds, during a virtual training to LEA grant leaders around applying for the ARP-HCY II funds, as a presentation to LEA administrators, including special education directors, during standing weekly virtual office hours hosted by the Agency of Education, and in the Overview text of our digital ARP-HCY II application. LEAs will be encouraged to reach out to the State Coordinator for assistance in finding other LEAs that may need/want to join a consortium.

For both ARP Homeless I and ARP Homeless II:

- 1. How the SEA will ensure that ARP-HCY supplements the support and services provided with ARP ESSER funds and does not replace the use of ARP ESSER funds to support the needs of students experiencing homelessness;*

The SEA will continue to work to ensure that ARP-HCY funds are used to supplement supports and services provided with ARP ESSER funds, and other federal funds, at both the state and local levels. At the local level, this is accomplished by including this expectation

in trainings, guidance documents, and application language, by evaluating proposed activities for funding against existing funded strategies, and ultimately through monitoring of awardees.

At the state level, the State Coordinator of Homeless Education and Assistant Director of Federal Education and Support Programs will work closely with colleagues across the Agency to ensure that spending of ARP-HCY funds does not supplant other federal funds used for similar initiatives. This will be true of both new activities to be funded exclusively with ARP-HCY state funds, as well as when coordinating ARP-HCY funds to supplement and expand summer programming and wraparound services initiatives already being funded with ARP ESSER funds. See response to first prompt, above.

- 2. The extent to which the SEA will use its State-level activities funds to award subgrants or contracts to community-based organizations that are well-positioned to identify children and youth experiencing homelessness in historically underserved populations such as rural children and youth, Tribal children and youth, students of color, children and youth with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ+ youth, and pregnant, parenting, or caregiving students experiencing homelessness, and connect them to educationally-related support and wraparound services; and*

As detailed above, the Vermont Agency of Education has identified strengthening LEA capacity to identify, enroll, and provide appropriate services to students experiencing homelessness, providing outreach and resources to raise awareness statewide of student eligibility for services and rights, and improving LEA knowledge of available community resources to support this population as priorities for sub-grants and contracts. We believe in leveraging the existing infrastructure of the school setting to connect students and families to resources, in line with the community schools model. In seeking bids for contracts or proposals for sub-grants to support LEAs in these meeting these goals, the Vermont Agency of Education will seek deliverables that, in many cases, may be met by community-based organizations and will design bid review processes that will advantage community-based entities to the extent appropriate and allowable.

- 3. How the SEA will encourage LEAs to award contracts to community-based organizations to help identify and support historically underserved populations experiencing homelessness.*

The Vermont Agency of Education encouraged LEAs to award contracts to community-based organizations through the competitive application for ARP Homeless I funds, with applications scored, in part, based on a narrative prompt concerning this practice. This practice was/is encouraged in the text of both the ARP Homeless I and Homeless II applications, in the content of guidance documents summarizing both funding opportunities, and in training provided to LEAs in advance of the application opening.

Chief State School Officer or Authorized Representative (Typed Name): Daniel M. French, Ed.D.	
Signature:	Date: