CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting Students and Families Experiencing Shelter Insecurity

What's Going On?

Learning from home for students identified as homeless (under the McKinney-Vento Act) during the pandemic may create more challenges. Considering their needs and prior planning for when they will return to school may be beneficial for students and all instructional staff.

Tips to Consider

Practical Tips

❑ Locating currently identified McKinney-Vento students/families during summer months is often quite challenging; more so now without physically seeing these students in school during the spring. Before re-entry, consider deploying additional staff to reach out to families to find out where they are, what their plans are for September and connect them with resources as needed.

❑ If school or resource personnel are unable to connect with a family, utilize contacts listed for these students on their emergency contact cards for assistance in reaching out to these students/ families and offering support.

Social Emotional Tips Before School Starts

❑ Despite all the challenges many students will be facing during return to school, this population is even more vulnerable. Encourage those who families/ students first come in contact with (clerical staff, administrators, security, or teachers) to be patient and listen with compassion. Ideally have a staff person who is trusted by the family make any initial contacts. Remind these staff members that even during "non-pandemic times" homeless students and their families are in a state of crisis. Instability is exacerbated during this health and economic crisis.

❑ Make social distancing "home" visits if a meeting time and location are possible. Utilize school mental health staff's summer work hours to make visits to know shelter locations to check in on students and their families and let them know that they are missed and cared about. Use those opportunities to listen to and assess what resources students/families need; follow up with families as appropriate. Update contact information for further home/school communication.

❑ Identify one school staff member as a point of contact for each student, or for families with several siblings, one per family.

❑ Identify who the children feel most connected to at school. Reach out to that staff member to invite them to be an additional support to the student when they return. Having connections to caring adults may be a significant protective factor and promote better attendance.

❑ Inquire what additional concerns they have regarding a return to school; what social-emotional supports that they anticipate students will need.

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Social Emotional Tips Before School Starts

❑ As students look to talk about their home experience during school closures, be sensitive to shelter insecure students who may not want to talk about their own home situations. Offer students options to pass when the subject comes up. Be aware of home situations when asking questions or inviting students to share photos, stories of their experiences, etc.

❑ Find opportunities for private communication with students and/or their family members about how they are navigating virtual school days and offer opportunities for support. If your school is allowing some students (i.e., special needs) to spend more time in the school building, be sure to include shelter insecure students in this group.

❑ Help these students to feel less alone in their experiences by highlighting challenges all students (and adults) are facing with loneliness or insecurity about the future. Acknowledge that students have had all different experiences and invite students to share with you privately any concerns they have.

❑ Recognize that these students may have stronger emotions than students in more stable home situations and that those emotions may show up through behavior.