




Supporting McKinney Vento Students During COVID 19

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Resources from NCHE, SHC, NAEHCY



In 2017-2018, public schools identified the highest number of children & youth experiencing homelessness ever recorded – 1.5 million. That number is likely to skyrocket because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite this record figure, child and youth homelessness isn't always visible. Children and youth without a home often move from place to place – motels, cars, or any space that offers shelter and safety.

There is one home that all children and youth have in common: school.

Video: 1 minute





Identification Strategies during COVID

- Ensure liaisons have adequate capacity to identify McKinney-Vento students.
 - Use a [simple tool](#) to assess liaison capacity.
 - Use [COVID-19 relief funding](#) and [Title I, Part A funding](#) to increase liaison capacity.
 - Designate school building-level liaisons to increase the LEA's overall capacity to respond to homelessness.
 - Use short [training materials](#) to ensure new district and building-level liaisons are prepared to discharge their duties. Many schools and districts are reporting increased staff turnover due to COVID-19 and economic stressors.
- As a first step, reach out to families and youth identified as homeless last school year. Given the economic impacts of COVID-19, they are more likely than usual to continue to experience homelessness this school year.
- Embed [questions](#) and [information](#) about homelessness in all school enrollment documents, including online enrollment systems.



Identification Strategies

- Take serious, deliberate steps to ensure racial and ethnic equity in identification and reach out to culturally-specific organizations. Disproportionate, and sometimes fatal, involvement with law enforcement and child protective services may prevent Black students and families from revealing homelessness for fear of involvement with those systems. Undocumented students and families, and even many with legal visas, are increasingly afraid to discuss housing needs with public agencies like schools. Sensitive, non-threatening conversations are essential.
- Language barriers can make online systems, housing questionnaires, and other identification processes difficult for some parents and youth to understand. Ensure translated materials are readily available and engage bilingual staff to communicate with families.
- Native American students and families may not recognize McKinney-Vento living situations as homelessness. Many also continue to suffer from historical trauma of being forced into abusive boarding schools. As recently as the 1970s, the United States education system was being used to strip culture from Native children. Clear and trauma-informed explanations of the McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness, and supportive services available, are essential.

Identification Strategies

- ▶ Embed [questions](#) and [information](#) about homelessness in all school and district outreach efforts, including: food pick-up or delivery; mailing of learning packets; emails or other communications that are going out to all parents/students; school/district automated calling systems; and the school/district website, Facebook page, and other social media.
- ▶ Many new families and youth are likely to fall into homelessness due to current economic stressors. It is more important than ever to ensure that all parents and students know about McKinney-Vento and related rights.
- ▶ Ensure that [trained](#) staff are available to connect with McKinney-Vento families and students at the start of the new school year, including registrars, other enrollment personnel, and teachers.



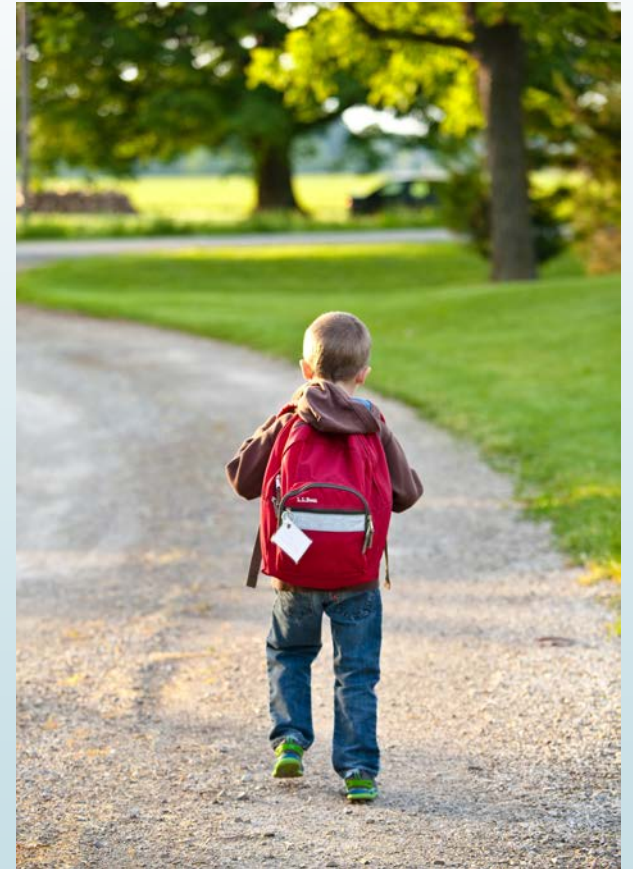


Training Staff on Potential Homelessness in the Context of Distance Learning

- Frequent changes in the background of where the student is working; the student appears to be changing location frequently
 - Many different people in the background, beyond just the student's immediate family
 - Background in a motel/hotel
 - Background in public areas
 - Student/parent unreachable for periods of time
 - Difficulty participating in scheduled class times/ completing assignments
- **From Taylor Paquette** McKinney-Vento Liaison, Nashua School District, NH

Identification Strategies

- Post [flyers](#), brochures, and posters in the community where students and parents might see them, such as campgrounds, motels, libraries, laundromats, grocery stores, and pharmacies.
- Engage all your community partners: food banks, laundromats, legal services, faith communities, motels, campgrounds, shelters, Boys and Girls clubs, LGBTQ youth organizations, culturally-specific organizations, clinics serving low-income families, public benefits offices, 211, and others.
 - Ask community partners to use an [online referral form](#) to connect families and youth to McKinney-Vento liaisons.
- Connect with your local eviction court and sheriff's offices to ask them to provide McKinney-Vento information to families who are evicted.
- Ask local radio and TV news stations to talk about McKinney-Vento services in the news and during commercial breaks, and to provide the liaison's contact information.





Identification Strategies

What questions can help identify students and families experiencing homelessness in the COVID-19 context?

- Have you had an eviction deferred, and when will the eviction moratorium end?
- Have you had rent or utility payments deferred, and when will those payments resume?
- Have you had steady income?
- Do you have a working stove and refrigerator?
- How long have you been where you are staying currently, and how long do you think you will be able to stay there?



Right to Immediate Enrollment in Online Enrollment

Does the enrollment website include information about McKinney-Vento rights, including immediate enrollment without documents, and services?

- Place McKinney-Vento information prominently on the front page(s) of the enrollment website. Use descriptive terms such as “staying temporarily,” “staying in someone else’s home,” or “in transition,” rather than labels like “homeless” that families and students may not identify with or understand.
- Explain that McKinney-Vento students can enroll without the usual documents, and provide an easy and immediate avenue for that enrollment.
- Display McKinney-Vento enrollment information and forms prominently.
- Provide contact information for the McKinney-Vento liaison and other school staff trained on enrolling students experiencing homelessness.
- Place McKinney-Vento information prominently on individual school websites, as well as the district website.

Does the enrollment website provide an easily-accessible pathway for students experiencing homelessness to enroll without proof of residency, a parent or legal guardian, and other documents?

- Ask about students’ living situations among the first questions asked of all students in both online and paper enrollment processes.
- Design online enrollment forms and processes to accommodate McKinney-Vento situations, allowing students to enroll without proof of residency or a parent/guardian’s signature.
- Set enrollment forms to automatically provide the McKinney-Vento liaison with contact information for students who indicate possible homelessness.

Online Enrollment Language

[Appleton Area School District](#) (WI) changed its online enrollment homelessness filtering question from “Is the student homeless?” to “Is the student’s nighttime residence owned or rented by the parent/guardian?”

“I felt that changing the online enrollment housing question to a more factual and less subjective wording would help identify more students eligible for McKinney Vento support. When a parent answers ‘No’ to the question, a drop-down menu of living situation choices appears. This also results in the student’s name getting flagged for me in our student data system for assessment for McKinney Vento eligibility and support. If a parent answers ‘Yes,’ they simply get moved along to the next question. I also advocated to add a new question to help me identify unaccompanied homeless youth.”

– **Christi DeChamps, Homeless & Foster Care Support**

Online Enrollment Best Practices

Is the enrollment website, including McKinney-Vento information, written in a manner understandable to all families and students? Is information available in multiple languages?

- Keep enrollment instructions as brief as possible, and the process as simple as possible. Once the student is in school, additional follow-up can occur as needed.
- Ensure that the reading level of enrollment systems, and school and district websites overall, are at a level that allows parents with less than a high school education, and students themselves, to navigate the system easily.
- Remove any steps to enrollment that create additional barriers for students in homeless situations, whether enrolling online or in-person.
 - Offer an option for registrants to proceed without requesting a PIN or code.
 - Create a secure page for students in homeless situations to enter information.
- Offer online enrollment forms in all languages spoken in the district, and make links to these forms easy to locate.
- Enlist bilingual school staff to assist with both online and in-person enrollment.
- Partner with community organizations that serve students and families of color and immigrants, and train them in online enrollment processes, so they can support families and students.
- Create simple videos in multiple languages, and with subtitles, that explain McKinney-Vento rights and services, identify the McKinney-Vento liaison, and clarify enrollment instructions.

Alternatives to Online Enrollment

Are there convenient alternatives to online enrollment for students and families who cannot access the online format, or who need personal assistance to complete the enrollment process?

- Allow in-person enrollment at school sites as an alternative to online enrollment. As needed, in-person enrollment can follow social distancing and other safety measures that may be in place.
- Institute enrollment options by phone if schools are closed due to a pandemic.
- Ensure that online enrollment forms include simple instructions for accessing in-person or telephonic enrollment.
- Complete the student's enrollment in one visit, recognizing that finding the time and transportation to visit the school can be challenging for families and students experiencing homelessness.
- Ensure that all posters, brochures, and other materials that discuss enrollment of students experiencing homelessness include information about in-person enrollment, in addition to the web site address for online enrollment.
- Meet with students and families at community agencies like shelters, meal sites, and motels, to help eliminate transportation and other enrollment barriers.



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Online Enrollment – mobile friendly?

Is the enrollment website easily accessible from a phone, and with limited data allotment and speed, recognizing those realities for families and students experiencing homelessness?

- ▶ Streamline the initial enrollment process for quick completion even with slow or limited data connections.
- ▶ Ensure that the enrollment website, as well as school and district websites generally, are mobile-device friendly to allow enrollment quickly and easily on a tablet or smartphone.
- ▶ Design the enrollment process so families do not have to fill out the same information on multiple forms, or for multiple children at different schools.
- ▶ Create a process for quickly sharing information with different school campuses.



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Connectivity

Is the school ensuring that families and students have access to electronic devices and internet connectivity?

- ▶ Extend the practices that became common with school closures by providing students with tablets or laptops, mobile hotspots, prepaid cell phones, and other devices and connectivity. Title I, McKinney-Vento, and other funds can help meet those costs. Many corporate foundations and philanthropic organizations also are offering grants for technology assistance.
- ▶ Coordinate with community agencies to provide on-site computer stations and assistance with both online and in-person enrollment.
- ▶ Create mobile enrollment stations by equipping buses with laptops, internet, and staff at peak enrollment periods; buses can park in areas where homeless families and/or unaccompanied youth are concentrated.
- ▶ Reach out to Amelia Lyons at the DOE if you're looking for resources



Meals

► Issues

- Access to Transportation. Families may not be able to make it to food distribution sites, especially if those sites are in multiple locations, due to lack of access to safe, reliable transportation
- Access to Space and Refrigeration. Families may have trouble storing food because they don't have access to adequate space, refrigerators, etc.

► Strategies

- Collaboration with churches, businesses, organizations, community members to provide meals for families and students
- Delivery through collaboration with the local community
- Bus stop delivery through schools

Supplies and Learning Materials

- Provide supplies and materials to McKinney-Vento students
- Delivery made available through partnerships to provide students with the supplies and materials
- Drive through pick-ups
- Home visits to deliver supplies and learning materials

Mentors, Tutors

- Create a mentor and tutor program specifically for McKinney-Vento students
- Establish small cohorts for instruction
- Keep the students on a structured schedule
- Establish regular check-ins
- Create child care programs

Remember the right to remain in the school of origin!

Enrollment in a new school may not be in the best interest of students experiencing homelessness, despite changes in their living situation. It is critical that schools inform youth and families of their right to remain in the school of origin and receive transportation, and of the importance of school stability, whether instruction is being provided in-person, online, or via take-home packets.



Preparing for school reopening

Are there systems in place to identify returning McKinney-Vento students, as well as students who are newly experiencing homelessness?

- Current levels of unemployment and pending removals of eviction protections suggest imminent increases in homelessness among families who have never experienced it before, and who lack familiarity with available services and systems. As always, sensitive, trauma-informed outreach will be essential.
- Embed [questions](#) and [information](#) about homelessness in all school or district outreach efforts, including: food pick-up or delivery; mailing of learning packets; emails or other communications to all parents/students; school/district automated calling systems; and the school/district website, Facebook page, and other social media.
- Provide [training](#) to teachers, registrars, and other staff to assist with identification.
- If school will be held entirely or partially online, consult our "[Identifying Students Experiencing Homelessness During School Building Closures](#)" checklist.

Barriers to enrollment

Are schools prepared to address barriers to enrollment and retention in school, including ensuring access to COVID-related supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE), hygiene supplies, clothing, and laundry?

- Prioritize students experiencing homelessness for resources that will be provided to all students, or to low-income students. Deliver or mail resources to students who lack transportation to pick them up.
- Expand the amount and uses of the [Title I, Part A homeless set-aside](#) as needed, to ensure it is adequate to address new barriers and increases in homelessness created by COVID-19.
- Target [COVID-19 relief funding](#) to students experiencing homelessness.
- Ensure McKinney-Vento students have equitable access to all school activities, whether online or in-person.

Responding to Trauma

Do schools have plans in place to respond to increased trauma caused by extended shelter-in-place orders in unsafe living situations and increased economic stress?

- Screen for trauma when school restarts, either in person or online. Simple, well-researched instruments include UCLA's [COVID-19 Screen for Child/Adolescent PTSD](#) and the [Structured Trauma-Related Experiences and Symptoms Screener](#).
- Invite community mental health providers to support students virtually and/or on-site at schools.
- Implement trauma-informed training and practices available from the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#), [ACES Aware](#), or similar resources. A recent [review of programs with proven track records](#), many of which offer free tools and free online training, can help schools get started.
- Adopt [positive school discipline](#) practices school- and district-wide.
- Center equity: Take extra steps to ensure students of color have access to mental health supports, as [research](#) has found them less likely to reach out to teachers or counselors for mental health assistance. Also ensure mental health providers are LGBTQ+ positive and offer [online resources](#) sensitive to the challenges of LGBTQ+.

Community Collaborations

Are community collaborations robust, so families and students can receive additional services that support educational success?

- Connect with community agencies providing food, health care, mental health care, shelter, and housing to families or youth, to find out what is available and how your students and families can access it.
- Use [referral forms](#) that can be completed and submitted online, or emailed to the liaison, for providers to connect families and students with liaisons.
- If [211](#) or another resource referral service is not available locally, create an on-line resource list that families and youth can access on a mobile device, and that community partners can update directly, such as through a google doc.
- In rural areas in particular, connect with faith communities, civic organizations, and youth groups that might be able to share McKinney-Vento information with families and offer support or funding for basic needs and distance learning equipment.





Optional Resource

The Illinois State Board of Education has published [Guidance for Schools and Districts on Supporting Homeless Students During the 2021-21 School Year](#). This document is an excellent model for other states to help ensure equitable access to education and services for students experiencing homelessness, as the school year begins under the shadow of COVID-19.

- CENTER EQUITY.
- Keeping in touch with Black, Latinx, and Native students requires extra sensitivity and focused strategies. Parents of color are more likely to have had their own negative experiences with schools that may affect their comfort in communicating with schools, and are more likely to face language barriers. Liaisons, social workers, counselors, and teachers may be more effective reaching out to parents and students of color than administrators, attendance officers, or other staff who could be interpreted as threatening. ELL staff are ideal for connecting with parents and students who are recent immigrants, while Native American staff can help connect with Native students and families. Culturally-specific community agencies also can provide support.

Connecting with Students During Building Closures

Connecting with Students During Building Closures

- Use different means of communication to reach families and students: Email, phone, texting, regular mail, WhatsApp, Remind, “curbside” home visits, etc.
- Reach out to unaccompanied youth directly. Even if a parent’s contact information is in the school data system, remember that most unaccompanied youth have no contact with parents or guardians.
- Once you connect with a parent or youth, stay in touch on a regular schedule. Use [“check-in” forms](#) to guide weekly conversations with student and families. Begin by telling students they’re missed, and then inquire about supports they might need to stay safe, healthy, and engaged in school and early childhood programs.
- Post [flyers](#), brochures, and posters in the community where students and parents might see them, even if those locations are different due to COVID-19. For example, while campgrounds, motels, libraries and laundromats continue to be important places to post information, grocery stores and pharmacies might be even more essential locations for such information at this time.



Connecting with Students During Building Closures

- Visit local motels and campgrounds where families experiencing homelessness sometimes stay, placing flyers on vehicle windows or under doors. Maintain appropriate social distancing and other safety precautions.
- Create user-friendly websites and Facebook pages with clear information about community resources, food distribution, and distance learning, including how to obtain devices and internet connectivity.
- Set up a phone hotline for assistance with any needs.
- When delivering food or learning packets, ask about other needs and encourage families and students to keep in touch. Let them know they are missed, and that schools and early childhood programs are ready and able to help them.
- Provide parents and youth with the technology they need to stay in touch, such as pre-paid cell phones.
- Ask local radio and TV stations to encourage parents and students to connect with schools and early childhood programs, emphasizing the support available and talking about McKinney-Vento services during the news and commercial breaks.



What funds
are
available
for these
activities?

Title I, Part A funds, including both the
homeless set-aside and regular Title I funds

McKinney-Vento funds

Supplemental federal funds available
through the CARES Act

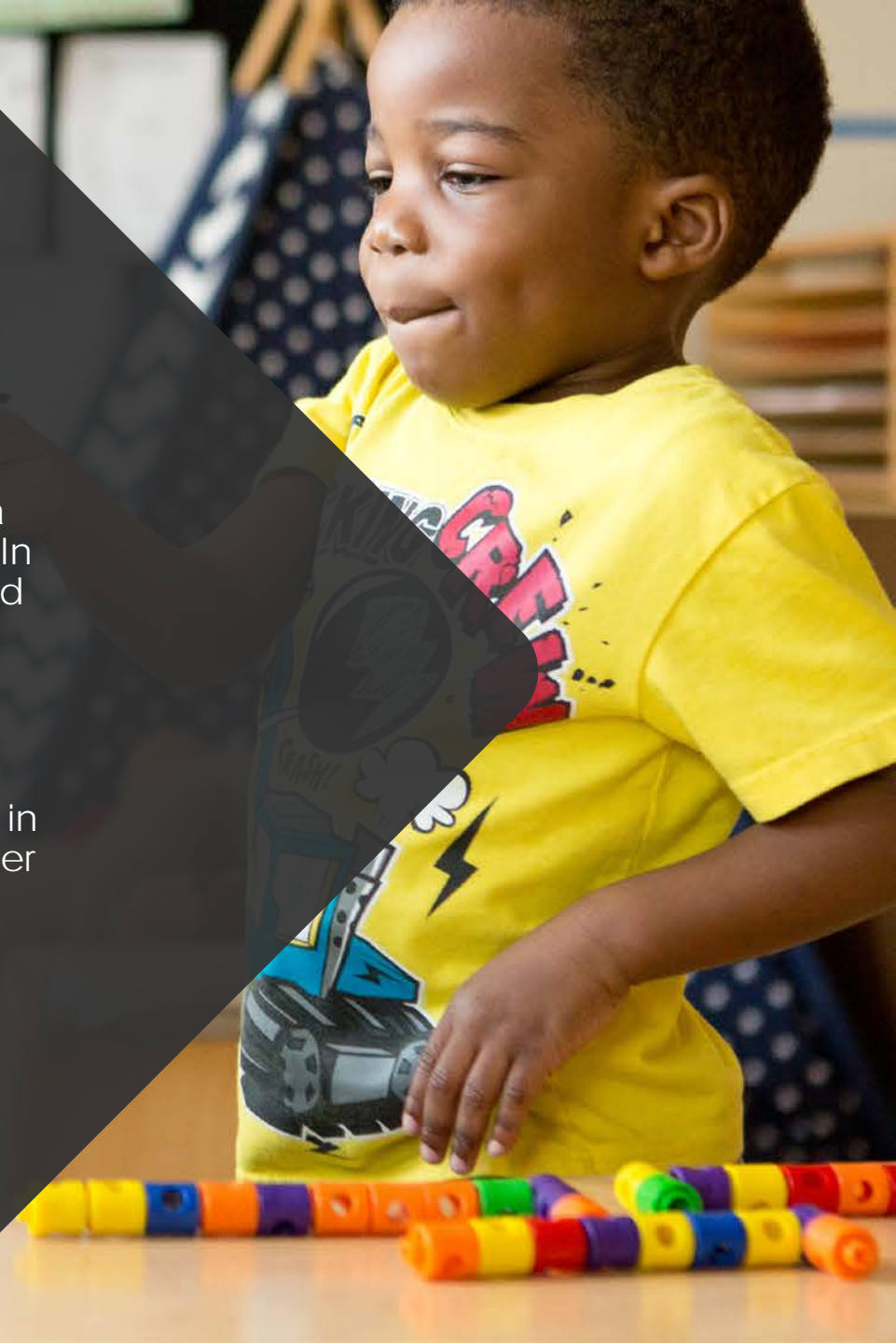
Other local educational agency and
early childhood program funds

Philanthropic and community support

Early Childhood Homelessness

Maintain proactive identification efforts.

- Many families with young children are likely to fall into homelessness as a result of job loss and economic struggles caused by the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, many families who are currently experiencing homelessness find themselves in urgent need of new living arrangements. Proactive identification efforts are necessary to find all families experiencing homelessness and ensure that they are connected to appropriate resources.
- Ask parents who are identified as homeless if there are younger children in the household; ask youth experiencing homelessness if they have younger siblings.
- Provide [flyers](#), posters, or other McKinney-Vento awareness materials to programs serving families with young children; post them in areas where families may be living (motels, campgrounds, etc.).



Early Childhood Homelessness

Ensure that meals and food products are age-appropriate and culturally relevant.

- ▶ Even prior to the COVID-19 crisis, it was not uncommon for homeless infants and young children—even those living in shelters—to suffer from poor nutrition. COVID-19, however, presents further threats to the ability of infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children to obtain adequate nutrition, as the pandemic has disrupted existing distribution systems, and any new distribution systems may not yet address the specific way that infants and toddlers eat.
- ▶ Evaluate the offerings of food distribution networks to assure that age-appropriate offerings, in adequate amounts, are available for infants, toddlers, preschool-age children, and their families experiencing homelessness, no matter where they are staying.
- ▶ Learn about the unique circumstances of each family prior to providing food. Most families experiencing homelessness are staying in unstable situations with other people, or in motels, and are not in shelters. They frequently must move from one temporary arrangement to another, and may not be staying in a place where they can store or refrigerate large amounts of food products, or prepare meals.
- ▶ Work with [Women, Infants, and Children](#) and [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) partners to ensure public schools, shelters, and other community distribution sites are familiar with meal patterns appropriate for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, and have age-appropriate meals available as part of their meal distribution plans.
- ▶ For McKinney-Vento liaisons: coordinate the provision of school meals for school-age children with programs serving young children to provide age-appropriate meals to younger siblings and/or younger relatives of students. Ensure that all community partners understand the [waivers granted for USDA programs](#), including those that allow parents or guardians to pick up meals for their children.



Additional Resources

[National
Center for
Homeless
Education](#)

[School House
Connection](#)

[ME DOE
McKinney-
Vento Site](#)

[NAEH CY](#)