

Brunswick School Department's McKinney-Vento Program

Featuring McKinney-Vento Liaison, **Shawn Lambert**

Shawn Lambert has spent more than three decades in Maine public education, working his way up from high school English teacher to principal and eventually director of the Oxford Hills Technical School. When he arrived as Assistant Superintendent of Brunswick School Department in the fall of 2019, he walked into his first week on the job and immediately found himself in a town hall meeting, not about curriculum or budgets, but about housing.

A wave of New Mainer families was arriving in Brunswick and the town's existing systems were not built for the influx of new families.

"Our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program consisted of a single person who was a part-time director and part-time teacher. And then housing became an issue."

Brunswick is not, Lambert points out, the community people often assume it to be. Despite its reputation as an affluent college town and cultural hub, nearly half of its students now qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, up from 30% just a few years ago, and housing costs remain a stubborn challenge.

"The rent in Brunswick is higher than in Northern Virginia and DC, and the pay is a lot more there. It's untenable."

That first week set the tone for the seven years that followed. Lambert inherited the McKinney-Vento liaison role as part of his assistant superintendent responsibilities. This was a structure that, as he quickly came to understand, made a great deal of sense.

"You've got to be in a place positioned to be able to oversee all the schools. And you've got to be in a place to be able to commit funds for transportation and services. I can say yes."

That ability to say yes, quickly and without bureaucratic delay, has become one of the defining features of how Brunswick School Department serves students and families experiencing housing instability. Over the last seven years, Lambert has built systems, developed partnerships, and established a reputation as a school district where families experiencing hardship can find support.



Brunswick School Department serves 2,400 students across four schools.

A STRUCTURE BUILT FOR RESPONSIVENESS

Brunswick School Department serves approximately 2,400 students across four schools, including a Pre-K through grade 2 building, a grades 3-5 school, a middle school serving grades 6-8, and Brunswick High School. Each school has a designated McKinney-Vento coordinator, typically a school counselor, who serves as the on-the-ground point of contact for students and families.

Lambert oversees the full team as the official McKinney-Vento liaison for the district and maintains the district-wide list of identified McKinney-Vento students. However, he is careful about how that list gets built.

“I don’t put anybody on the spreadsheet until I get an intake form. I’m adamant about that. I don’t want to miss anybody.”

The intake form requirement creates accountability and consistency across the district. Once a form is submitted, a technology staff member ensures the student’s McKinney-Vento status is entered into the district’s student information system, creating a clean and auditable record.

Identification happens through multiple entry points. Lambert developed a McKinney-Vento training module that is part of the district’s suite of mandatory trainings for all employees including teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff alike. The training explains what McKinney-Vento is, outlines signs of housing instability, and, importantly, reminds staff that their job is awareness, not investigation.

The district’s annual re-enrollment packet includes a residency form that automatically flags households that may qualify, generating leads for counselors to follow up. And each August, Lambert sends school liaisons the prior year’s list of identified students and asks them to confirm current status before the school year begins.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

What truly distinguishes Brunswick School Department’s McKinney-Vento program is the web of community relationships Lambert has spent seven years building. He is quick to credit those around him, but many of those connections have formed from his efforts.

Every two weeks, Lambert attends an Unhoused Stakeholder Meeting. This group meets biweekly to discuss how to support unhoused individuals in Brunswick. Participants represent various community groups including: Brunswick School Department, Brunswick Police Department, Midcoast Youth Center, Mid Coast Community Health, Town of Brunswick Human Services, Tedford Shelter, Brunswick Warming Center, Brunswick Parks and Rec, Brunswick Area Interfaith Council, Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program, The Gathering Place Daytime Shelter, the Curtis Memorial Library, and OPTIONS.



Pictured is an **Unhoused Stakeholder Group Meeting** that meets biweekly to discuss how to support unhoused individuals in Brunswick.

His collaboration with the Town of Brunswick's General Assistance (GA) office has grown especially strong, in part through the state's **Preventing Student Homelessness (PSH)** grant funds. When GA staff learned that the district had resources to help families avoid eviction, the referrals started flowing both directions.

"She would reach out to me and say, 'Have you got any money left in your magic pot?' And we've been able to do some really good things with different family situations."

Lambert also developed a relationship with the manager of a local hotel, which is a connection that has paid off in moments of genuine crisis. He recalls a principal calling him about a family whose parent had been in the hospital and could not return to their home. They needed somewhere to stay.

"I called the manager and said, this is the situation and this is what I have. Can you make it work for them to stay there for seven days for the amount I have available? And he said 'Yeah, we can do that.' That still chokes me up. To be able to do that."



Pictured is **Dana Taylor**, a member of Brunswick School Department's transportation staff.

Other key partners include Midcoast Youth Center, which until recently employed a full-time case manager - funded through a Maine Housing grant - who worked directly with Brunswick families on housing searches, employment, and other needs. Lambert coordinated closely with that case manager, dividing responsibilities based on funding flexibility.

"She would end up meeting with people and help them find housing, find work or repair a car. Her funds were a lot more fungible than mine."

Lambert also co-founded **Brunswick Cares**, an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit, alongside the vice chair of the school board. Its mission is to lower barriers to participation in curricular and co-curricular school activities for students who face financial hardship. While the school district's budget generally covers curricular needs, Brunswick Cares focuses especially on co-curricular activities. For example, purchasing swim gear for a student who wants to join the swim team, or covering the cost of snow tubing passes for students in the high school's outing club. Because it operates as an independent nonprofit rather than a school district program, it has more flexibility in how funds are raised and spent.

"It's funded creatively. It didn't come out of taxpayer funds. It's independent, and that allows us to do these things."

The organization is not exclusively for students experiencing homelessness. It serves any student who faces financial barriers to participation and it has become a meaningful resource for many families in the Brunswick community.

ADVICE FOR THE FIELD

When asked what he would tell a new McKinney-Vento liaison just starting out, Lambert’s advice is clear and practical: make sure the person in the role has real decision-making authority. Empower the people closest to students and families. Build relationships relentlessly. And don’t be afraid to pick up the phone, including calling the Maine Department of Education.

Most importantly, he says, keep the purpose of it all in front of you at all times.

“It’s less about certifying that they qualify. It’s less about number of days or status. It’s more about, if you’re asking me for help, I’m going to assume you’re asking because you need it. So I’m going to help you and here’s how I’m going to help you.”

For new liaisons and veterans alike, his message is the same: relationships are what make the work matter.

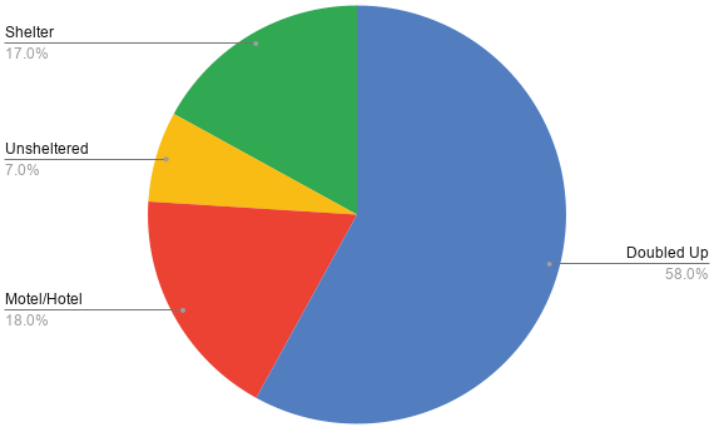
BRUNSWICK’S MCKINNEY-VENTO PROGRAM: BY THE NUMBERS

Brunswick School Department has tracked McKinney-Vento (MV) student data across all four schools since 2019 and the longitudinal trends tell an important story:

Academic Year	Total Identified McKinney-Vento Students
2019-20	85
2020-21	46
2021-22	50
2022-23	81
2023-24	130
2024-25	80
2025-26	80

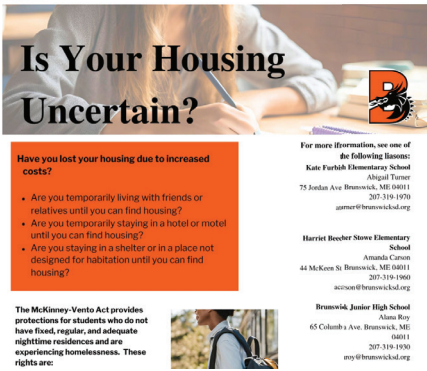
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, MV identification numbers dropped significantly, not because housing instability decreased, but likely because schools became disconnected from their most vulnerable families during remote learning.
- Numbers then surged in 2023-24, largely due to an influx of New Mainer families placed in Maine Housing-contracted apartments in Brunswick. Many of these families had been living in shelters and hotels in other districts before arriving so they retained their MV status through the end of that school year despite having signed leases.
- One of the most telling patterns in Brunswick’s data is what happens to students when they are no longer eligible for McKinney-Vento status and have found fixed, regular, and adequate housing: the vast majority do not appear in Brunswick’s enrollment the following year, suggesting that they were unable to find stable, affordable housing in the community and left the district entirely.

2025-2026 McKinney-Vento Data by Category



Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY) in 2025-2026 Academic Year	#
Total number of UHY	5
% of Brunswick's McKinney-Vento students who are UHY	6.25%

Brunswick School Department
Homeless Education



Is Your Housing Uncertain?

Have you lost your housing due to increased costs?

- Are you temporarily living with friends or relatives until you can find housing?
- Are you temporarily staying in a hotel or motel until you can find housing?
- Are you staying in a shelter or in a place not designed for habitation until you can find housing?

The McKinney-Vento Act provides protections for students who do not have fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residences and are experiencing homelessness. These rights are:

For more information, see one of the following liaisons:

Kate Furlish Elementary School
 Alliegh Turner
 75 Jordan Ave Brunswick, ME 04011
 207-319-1970
 gturner@brunswicked.org

Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School
 Amanda Canon
 44 McKee St Brunswick, ME 04011
 207-319-1960
 acanon@brunswicked.org

Brunswick Junior High School
 Alan Roy
 65 Columbia Ave Brunswick, ME 04011
 207-319-1930
 mroy@brunswicked.org

Brunswick School Department offers a dedicated McKinney-Vento webpage that provides information and helps students and families access the support they need. Pictured is the McKinney-Vento landing page.

Education of Homeless Students

This course is about the education of students experiencing homelessness. In it you will learn the federal definition of homelessness for students, how the law has evolved, resources the school district may provide, signs that a student might be experiencing homelessness, and how to help an unhoused student.

In addition to the text presented here, there is an additional resource of a narrated presentation on this topic. It is the same presentation as last year. Employees are invited to view this resources for a deeper understanding of the topic.

Once you have reviewed the following information, please scroll to the top of this page and click "Done" when you are ready to proceed to the 5-question Kahoot or return to the course to review the resources.

McKinney-Vento Law

The McKinney-Vento law, named after two federal lawmakers, supports educational rights for students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, it describes the following:

- Definition of homelessness:** Students lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
- Educational rights:** Ensures enrollment, attendance, and success in school.

All Brunswick School Department employees must complete an annual McKinney-Vento training module at the start of each school year. Pictured is an image of the online training course.

Thank you to Shawn and all the Brunswick School Department staff, administrators, and community partners who come together to support McKinney-Vento students and families.

Across the state of Maine, McKinney-Vento liaisons like Shawn work to ensure that students experiencing housing instability and homelessness have the support they need to stay in school and have opportunities to succeed. McKinney-Vento liaisons serve as a vital bridge between students, families, and the resources that help them feel supported and safe.

Each month, we will feature McKinney-Vento programs, the liaisons who lead them, and the teams of staff, administrators, and collaborative partners who support McKinney-Vento students and families each day. If you are a McKinney-Vento liaison or an SAU that would like to be featured, please reach out to Signe Lynch, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Specialist, at signe.lynch@maine.gov and we would love to set up an interview.