

RSU 10's McKinney-Vento Program

Featuring McKinney-Vento Liaison, Kasey Flagg

In RSU 10 of the Western Foothills of Maine (serving Buckfield, Hanover, Hartford, Mexico, Roxbury, Rumford, and Sumner), **Kasey Flagg** is one of two designated McKinney-Vento liaisons at RSU 10 supporting students and families across four schools. Mike Webber is the McKinney-Vento Liaison for the Nezinscot Region (Buckfield, Hartford and Sumner), serving two schools.

In addition to her role as McKinney-Vento liaison, Kasey serves as the Community Project Manager, where she oversees family engagement, two school food pantries, and wellness initiatives that support staff and student health across the SAU. Kasey has been the McKinney-Vento liaison for four years and has worked in RSU 10 for six years.



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Student Identification

In RSU 10, all families are asked to complete a housing information form at the start of the school year. As part of this screener, anyone who marks anything other than “I’m in my own home” is referred to the McKinney-Vento liaisons for follow up.

As the school year continues, teachers, counselors, school nurses, and secretaries are all part of a close-knit web of support. They might notice a student’s comment in class or pick up on a sign of struggle—and then reach out to Kasey or a school staff member.

“We’re always listening. Students will confide in the school secretary, or a teacher might notice something off. It’s about relationships. That’s how we make sure no one slips through the cracks.”

One significant change that led to positive relationship-building opportunities with students was moving Kasey’s office from the central office into the high school:

“I used to work out of our central office, but when they needed the space, I moved into a shared office at the high school with the nurse. Honestly, the change has completely transformed how I connect with students. Now, they can just walk in—it’s immediate and natural. Before, the process felt more distant: a school might contact me and say, ‘Hey, we think you should connect with this student; we heard they might be staying with a friend,’ but there wasn’t much direct contact at first. Now, it’s so much more organic. I can check in with students right away, have conversations in the moment, and build trust more quickly.”

Being based in the high school offers an important opportunity to connect with some of the most vulnerable McKinney-Vento students. One of the biggest challenges Kasey shares is supporting unaccompanied high school students who don't have a safe place to stay and are too young for the local adult shelter.

“That’s our biggest barrier—students under 18 who are on their own. There’s nowhere for them to go, so they end up couch-surfing or staying in places that aren’t safe, but that’s their only option. The shelter here doesn’t take anyone under 18 unless they’re with a guardian. So even though I can collaborate with them for younger families, it’s really tricky for our older students who aren’t quite old enough.”

Building Trust with Families

Kasey approaches outreach to families with care, recognizing that trust is essential.

“There are families I feel comfortable reaching out to directly. But if they’re new or going through housing instability for the first time, I try to protect that trust. We never want to ruin the relationship a family has with the school. As a mom, I always think—how would I feel getting a call like that? If a concern comes up, I usually have the school counselor or social worker check in first, because they often have a relationship with the family. We are really lucky to have school counselors and social workers in all of our buildings. It truly is an asset. If the family is open to it, I’ll follow up—but if not, we leave the door open and let them know help is there. That’s the key—building trust, not breaking it.”



Kasey and a colleague did food deliveries to families when one of the schools abruptly shut down.

The RSU 10 McKinney-Vento Team & Community Partnerships

In RSU 10, Kasey says that the McKinney-Vento team consists of two McKinney-Vento liaisons, the social workers based in each school, and the school counselors. Weekly meetings bring together the school counselors and social workers to discuss student needs. Kasey also says that the teachers, secretaries, nurses, and administrators are key to identifying students and providing support.

“I’m very fortunate. We have great social workers, secretaries, counselors, and administrators here. Everyone is great about checking in with our kids and doing what we can while they’re here. One administrator said, ‘All these kids are our kids—it doesn’t matter if they’ve been here a day or for years.’ That support makes a huge difference. The sense of community is so important.”

For community partners and local resources, Kasey says that although the rural region has limited resources available, RSU 10’s McKinney-Vento program has partnered with River Valley Healthy Community Coalition and the Friends of the River Valley. Community Concepts and General Assistance also offer important support to students and families.

“Community Concepts has helped families access everything from heating system replacement to wraparound services for families. General assistance has helped some families with Central Maine Power (CMP) bills and even provided short-term hotel stays when needed. And they keep an updated landlord list—that’s actually really helpful.”

Supporting Student & Family Needs

Kasey says that in RSU 10, students and families have an array of needs, including needing support paying for utility bills, finding housing, transportation, mental health services, and food.

“CMP bills are a huge struggle for people around here. There’s a CMP Customer Advocate who’s been amazing. She helped me understand their support options so I can walk families through it more easily.”

Access to food remains one of the most common needs. All schools in the Mountain Valley region have food pantries, and elementary schools run backpack programs that send meals home with students each week. Additional support has come through the state-funded **Preventing Student Homelessness Pilot Program Grant**, which has helped cover urgent expenses such as rent, heating oil, and winter clothing.

Stand Out Story

A student once quietly asked a staff member for toilet paper to bring home—and was initially told, “No, we don’t have any to give out.” Kasey found out later, through a casual comment and thought, “It probably took so much for her to even ask. That moment made me say, ‘We have to do something different. Our students deserve better.’” Kasey contacted the Building, Grounds and Transportation Director to see if they had toilet paper available. He ended up reaching out to custodians across RSU 10. Together, they collected toilet paper and hygiene supplies for the student. “That act of kindness—that’s what made us want to start our pantry. To do more for our students.”

This situation helped launch a student pantry at the high school—something that hadn’t existed before. With help from Good Shepherd Food Bank, Friends of the River Valley, Women of Steel, Sunday River, and other local partners, the pantry grew to include snacks, hygiene products, and groceries.

“We open the pantry twice a week near the student bus line. Students pop in and grab a snack at the end of the day while others fill a bag. Because of this, they can shop without stigma. Students can also request to visit privately during the school day. If they’re not comfortable coming in, we’ll pack bags or even deliver food to their homes. We also keep hygiene products, snacks, and clothes in our office so students can grab something whenever they need it. We try to be flexible and we want students and families to feel comfortable. If they don’t feel safe or seen, they may not ask for help—and their needs won’t be met.”



Kasey and a colleague stand in front of the Mountain Valley High School Student Food Pantry.

Advice for New Liaisons

Kasey shares that, *“It’s overwhelming at first. But the connections with students—that’s the highlight. Even if I can’t fix the problem, just being someone who listens, that matters. And go to the Regional McKinney-Vento Meetings! You learn so much and come away better prepared.”*

Thank you to Kasey and all the RSU 10 staff, administrators, and community partners who come together to support McKinney-Vento students and families.

Across the state of Maine, McKinney-Vento liaisons like Kasey 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.lynych@maine.gov and we would love to set up an interview.