



## RSU 9's McKinney-Vento Program

Featuring McKinney-Vento Liaison, **Amanda Clark**

For the past three years, **Amanda Clark** has been a source of support for students and families in RSU 9. RSU 9, also known as the Mt. Blue Regional School District, serves ten towns in western Maine: Farmington, Wilton, Industry, New Sharon, Chesterville, Starks, Temple, Vienna, Weld, and New Vineyard. These communities are located across Franklin, Kennebec, and Somerset counties.

Starting in 2022 as a school social worker, Amanda quickly became known for her commitment to meeting students' holistic needs. That commitment eventually led her to take on the McKinney-Vento liaison role—now in her third year—where she supports students experiencing homelessness from Pre-K through grade 12.

Today, Amanda serves as RSU 9's **Family Engagement and Student Support Coordinator**, a districtwide role focused on supporting elementary schools while also overseeing McKinney-Vento services across all grade levels. The expansion of her responsibilities has deepened her dedication.

*"I found a lot of fulfillment in the McKinney-Vento role," she shared.*

*"It opened my eyes to how prominent housing instability is in our community."*

### A Strong, Responsive System: Student Identification

RSU 9 has built a thoughtful and proactive structure for identifying and supporting students who may be experiencing housing instability. Identification happens through multiple avenues: back-to-school paperwork, word of mouth, teacher referrals, enrollment information, and automatic flags in PowerSchool based on student attendance. Amanda sees her role as making housing instability "visible"—something that staff are comfortable noticing and responding to.

*"Seeing how much our staff care, and how much they want to understand what families are experiencing—it's really uplifting," Amanda said.*

**Mt. Blue  
Regional School District  
RSU #9**



COMMUNITY | CULTURE | CURRICULUM

*"Working together to provide high-quality educational opportunities for all."*

RSU 9 serves ten towns in Western Maine across Franklin, Kennebec, and Somerset counties.

Weekly and biweekly **Community Connect meetings** bring together administrators, social workers, and Amanda to share emerging needs and coordinate support. Strong communication and trusting relationships among staff have greatly improved early identification. This spring, a well-attended “Choose Your Own Adventure” professional development session on McKinney-Vento underscored staff commitment.

From the 2023-2024 to the 2024-2025 school year, **RSU 9 saw a 36% increase in McKinney-Vento identified students**. This increase can be attributed to an expanded district effort to proactively identify students and provide support, in addition to the socioeconomic challenges families are currently facing. The data this year suggest that numbers are continuing to grow this 2025-2026 school year.

Additionally, for the 2023-2024, 2024-2025, and 2025-2026 academic years, **70-79% of McKinney-Vento students in RSU 9 were identified as being doubled up**.

## The RSU 9 McKinney-Vento Team

Although Amanda is the designated liaison, the work of supporting McKinney-Vento students and families is shared by many. School counselors, social workers, nurses, administrators, and teachers all serve critical roles. Teachers especially often identify concerns first through daily interactions with students.

*“RSU 9 has a shared sense of responsibility—it’s all hands on deck.”*

The district also partners with key community organizations, including clinical counseling providers, Western Maine Community Action, and various case management agencies that can help families navigate housing, healthcare, and other essential supports.

## Meeting Students’ Most Immediate Needs

The needs of McKinney-Vento students vary, but common concerns include access to food, clothing, safe housing, utility assistance, and counseling. Amanda frequently helps families develop plans to stay housed, prevent eviction, and maintain stability.

*“There just isn’t an abundance of housing in our area,” she explained. “With many rentals reserved for local college students and long waitlists for affordable units, prevention becomes the top priority.”*

RSU 9 utilizes district funds as well as the state’s **Preventing Student Homelessness (PSH) Program** to support families with utilities, rental assistance, security deposits, winter clothing, gas cards, and even equipment for extracurricular activities.



RSU 9's McKinney-Vento liaison, **Amanda Clark**.

One memorable example involved two students who dreamed of joining sports teams but lacked the required gear. With the state-funded **Preventing Student Homelessness funds**, Amanda was able to purchase the equipment they needed and the students were able to register and participate—dramatically boosting their confidence, attendance, and social connection.

## Relationship-Building: One Conversation at a Time

For Amanda, the heart of this work is relationship-building. She leads with connection long before discussing services. She recalls a high school student who had been couch surfing for months and struggled deeply with trust.

*“When I met with her, I didn’t immediately talk about housing,” Amanda said. “We spent 30 minutes just chatting about everything else. I talked to her as a human. The relationship came first, and the resources came after.”*

Normalizing the challenges families face, avoiding labels, and giving families time to process information all help create a foundation for two-way communication.

*“We’re here to support you,” she tells families. “There is nothing to be ashamed of.”*

## Advice for New McKinney-Vento Liaisons

Reflecting on her journey, Amanda shares thoughtful guidance for anyone stepping into the McKinney-Vento role. Above all, she emphasizes the importance of relationships.

*“Connections and relationships come first—always,” she said. “With your students, with their families, and with your teams in each school. None of the work happens without those relationships.”*

She also encourages new liaisons to take time to learn the landscape of local support.

*“A lot of families are in crisis,” she explained. “If you know what’s out there—case management, housing resources, heat assistance—you can help families filter all the information and point them in the right direction. That makes a huge difference.”*

Amanda is honest about the learning curve and has cited her own experience understanding and modifying systems to provide the best support for McKinney-Vento students and families.



RSU 9 offers a community-wide food pantry for all families in RSU 9 schools.

*“Give yourself time and grace,” she said. “I’m in my third year as the McKinney-Vento liaison and I’m still fine-tuning my systems—how I track, how I follow up. It takes time, and that’s okay.”*

Finally, she reminds new liaisons that they don’t have to navigate any of this alone.

*“Lean on Signe, the Maine Department of Education McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Specialist—she’s incredible,” Amanda shared. “Don’t hesitate to call her. She’s wonderful, and people should always reach out. Support is there.”*

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**Thank you** to Amanda and all the RSU 9 staff, administrators, and community partners who come together to support McKinney-Vento students and families.

Across the state of Maine, McKinney-Vento liaisons like Amanda 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](mailto:signe.lynch@maine.gov) and we would love to set up an interview.