STATE AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION STUDIES OF THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN – HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH (ARP-HCY) PROGRAM

Executive Summary

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State and Local Implementation Studies of the American Rescue Plan – Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY) Program

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This report is available at: https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/response-formula-grants/covid-19-emergency-relief-grants/american-rescue-plan-elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief-mdash-homeless-children-and-youth-arp-hcy#resources.

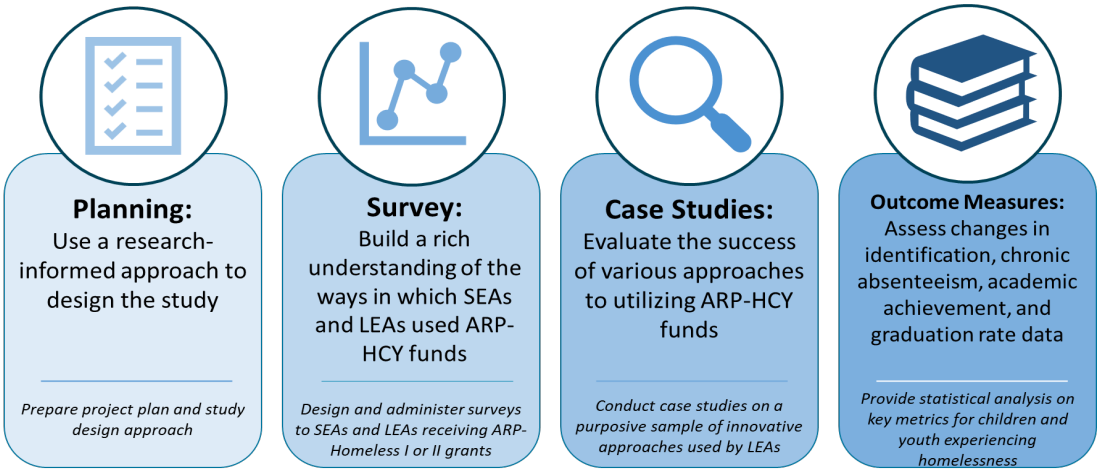
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Overview

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on students experiencing homelessness, Congress appropriated $800 million within the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 for Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY). The ARP-HCY program aimed to enhance the capacity of State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) to identify, enroll, and support students experiencing homelessness and to address academic and attendance challenges worsened by the pandemic, including through the provision of wraparound support services. Funding was allocated to SEAs by formula in two phases and SEAs were able to reserve up to 25% of their allocation for State-level activities.

This study comprehensively examines and documents the ways in which SEAs and LEAs have used ARP-HCY funds to implement strategies to better identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. It used a mixed-methods, phased approach to investigate the implementation of ARP-HCY funding **(Figure 1)**. Phase 1 involved a research-informed approach to design the study and to develop survey and data collection instruments informed by a literature on supporting students experiencing and at risk of experiencing homelessness, equitable educational approaches, and the SEA and LEA COVID-19 response. Phase 2 consisted of a quantitative data review of SEA and LEA survey data. Case studies were conducted and developed in Phase 3 to identify innovative strategies and document the impacts of ARP-HCY funding in more detail. The final phase consisted of statistical analyses of the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) Ed*Facts* LEA data files to assess changes in outcome measures in ARP-HCY subgrantee LEAs on children and youth experiencing homelessness. This four-phase approach allowed us to capture both immediate outcomes and the sustained effects from the time these funds were appropriated.

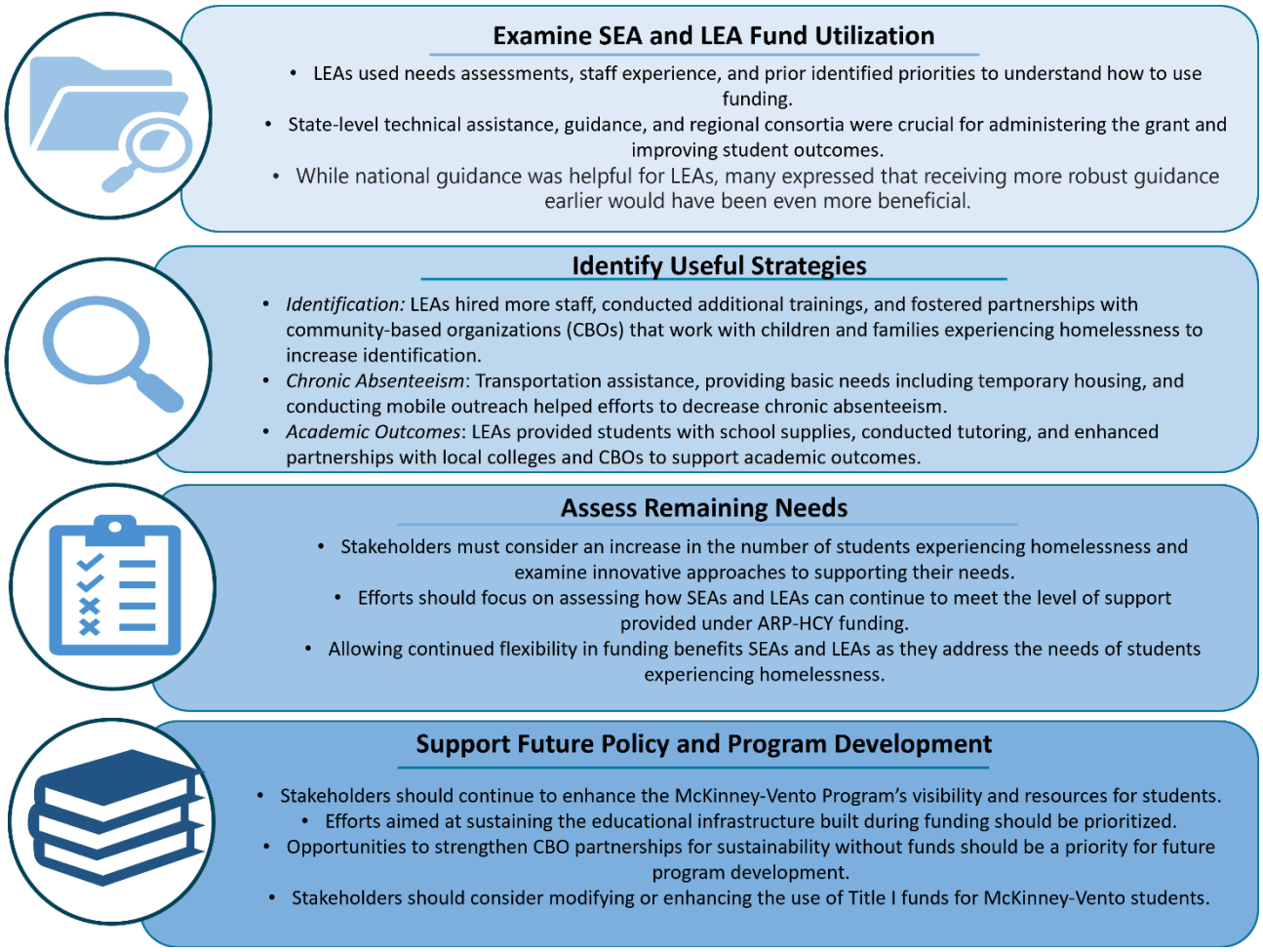
Figure 1. 2M's Mixed-Methods Approach for the State and Local Implementation Studies of ARP-HCY



Summary of Findings

This study was guided by four key objectives designed to provide actionable insight for federal, state, and local stakeholders: examining SEA and LEA fund utilization, identifying useful strategies, assessing remaining needs, and supporting future policy and program development. After the research team conducted an analysis of the phased research approach, several important findings emerged and are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Summary of Findings by Study Objective



The key findings of each phase of the study follow.

SEA and LEA Surveys

The survey instruments for SEAs and LEAs measured the implementation of ARP-HCY funding for statutorily permitted uses. The instruments included broad topic areas such as capacity-building, partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), the identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and sustainability after the one-time funding ends.

Web survey data collection was conducted in May and June of 2023 with an SEA response rate of 85% (44 SEAs) and an LEA response rate of 51% (1,694 LEAs) The response rate was much smaller for public charter school LEAs (33%) compared to traditional public school LEAs (54%). LEA sample weights were adjusted to minimize non-response bias.

The survey findings indicate that ARP-HCY provided a key source of funding for assisting SEAs and LEAs in their efforts to identify and support children and youth experiencing homelessness. Key findings included:

- Most SEAs used their State-level funds to add capacity in an effort to increase LEA participation in the ARP-HCY program, to help increase identification of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and to support better educational outcomes among this target population.
- LEAs most commonly used ARP-HCY funding for transportation and school supplies, which included items distributed at shelters or temporary housing facilities, such as materials needed for temporary educational setups.
- While most expanded services were provided by LEA staff, CBOs were utilized to provide various external services and coordination of these services.

LEAs widely reported that the funding was instrumental in addressing critical needs, though some challenges were noted, such as the limited, one-time nature of the funding, administrative burdens, and difficulties accessing funds. More detailed summary reports of the SEA survey and LEA survey results are available on ED's ARP-HCY Resources webpage.

Outcome Measures

To evaluate improvements in student identification, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and academic achievement for students experiencing homelessness, we examined data from LEAs receiving ARP-HCY funding to assess the impact of the ARP-HCY program. The analysis examined year-to-year changes in the student outcomes among ARP-HCY subgrantee LEAs and the number of LEAs reporting increases or decreases in student outcomes, while also comparing trends in the current metrics to pre-pandemic and peak pandemic levels.

ED collects annual data on students experiencing homelessness as part of its implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as reauthorized by Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). This study's analysis utilized Ed*Facts* LEA data files from ED for school years (SY) 2018-19, 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23. Data from SY 2019-20 was excluded due to pandemic-related disruptions.

Key findings from the statistical analysis include:

- Identification rates rebounded from COVID-19 pandemic impacts; by SY 2022-23, LEAs' identification rates were comparable to pre-pandemic levels, and 61% of ARP-HCY LEA subgrantees increased identification of students experiencing homelessness compared to SY 2020-21.
- By SY 2022-23, chronic absenteeism of students experiencing homelessness decreased in 24% of LEAs, compared to SY 2018-19, with 45% showing a consistent decline since the height of the pandemic in SY 2020-21.

- Forty percent of LEAs saw an increase in their **4-year adjusted-cohort graduation rate (ACGR)** from peak pandemic (SY 2020-21) for students experiencing homelessness.
- By SY 2022-23, 51% of LEAs reported higher **math proficiency** for students experiencing homelessness since SY 2020-21, while 49% and 43% saw increases in **reading/language arts** and **science proficiency**, respectively.

Many LEAs that received ARP-HCY funding were able to improve student outcomes by SY 2022–23, including with increasing the identification of students experiencing homelessness, reducing chronic absenteeism, and supporting improvements in graduation rates and academic achievement compared to peak pandemic levels in SY 2020-21. Although these trends were not consistent across all LEAs that received ARP-HCY funding, it's important to consider that while funds were made available in spring 2021, most districts did not receive their full allocations until spring 2022, and in some cases, not until spring 2023. Despite this delay, it is significant that a considerable portion of LEAs receiving these subgrant funds saw increases in all key academic measures in one or more of the 3.5 years in which these funds were made available, even while serving a greater number of students with greater academic support needs.

Overall, on measures that can be more directly impacted by LEA homeless liaisons and other staff, besides the significant increase in identification of students experiencing homelessness, there was a significant decrease in chronic absenteeism. Finally, the research team has observed that academic outcome data for ARP-HCY LEA subgrantees in grade level proficiency in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science, and the 4-year ACGR have returned to pre-pandemic levels after dipping significantly during the pandemic. For more detail on actual annual average rates of performance and percentage point changes over five reporting years, including the one preceding and the one following the COVID-19 national health emergency, please see National Outcomes Summary on ED's ARP-HCY Resources webpage.

Qualitative Case Studies

The qualitative phase of the research study involved conducting case studies of LEAs that incorporated useful strategies to identify and assist students experiencing homelessness. We selected nine LEAs across different states after considering a diverse set of criteria that included enrollment numbers of students experiencing homelessness, geographic characteristics, and evidence of potential innovative practices. **Figure 3** displays the nine LEAs selected for the case studies and their sampling characteristics.

Figure 3. Sampling Characteristics of Participating LEAs

LEA	State	Locale Classification	Works with a CBO	Wraparound Services	SY 21-22 Number Served and % of total student population
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District	AK	Rural	Yes	Yes	176 (2.09%)
San Diego Unified School District	CA	City	Yes	Yes	7,868 (8.26%)
Cherry Creek School District	CO	City	Yes	Yes	497 (0.93%)

Valdosta City Schools	GA	City	Yes	Yes	>300 (~3.6%)
Lafourche Parish School District	LA	Rural	Yes	Yes	1,342 (9.56%)
Kent Intermediate School District	MI	Suburban	Yes	Yes	Consortium
Region 3: Monmouth-Ocean Regional Educational Services Commission	NJ	Suburban	Yes	Yes	Consortium
Waco Independent School District	TX	City	Yes	Yes	476 (3.23%)
Fairfax County Public Schools	VA	Suburban	Yes	Yes	2,095 (1.17%)

Data were collected between March 2024 and May 2024 with four to nine interviews conducted per site, which included semi-structured interviews with the local LEA liaison, the respective state coordinator for education of homeless children and youth, additional LEA staff, and community-based partners. Key findings from this analysis included:

- All LEAs reported focusing on increasing identification and reducing chronic absenteeism. The most common strategies included more personalized support from staff, enhanced basic needs support, technology (such as hotspots), transportation, and temporary hotel and motel stays.
- All LEAs reported impacts on academic achievement, with some noting a rise in test scores and graduation rates. Strategies included tutoring, after-school and summer programming through community-based partnerships, support for graduating seniors, and enhanced case management.
- The perceived flexibility for utilizing funds allowed for faster and broader implementation of strategies and approaches to support students experiencing homelessness, including transportation, basic needs, mental health, medical care, and disaster relief.
- Community-based partnerships were essential to expanding the capacity of LEAs to utilize ARP-HCY funding for the support of a wide range of student needs.

While many liaisons were concerned about the impact of the end of funding, all were considering how to continue providing robust support to students experiencing homelessness. In addition to identifying alternative funding, most LEAs were planning to rely on the CBO relationships that had been enhanced during the funding period. Two of the participating LEAs, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District in Alaska and Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, were selected for spotlight briefs that feature key findings of their qualitative case study and outcomes analysis and are available on the ARP-HCY Resources webpage.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of this one-time, large infusion of funding to meet the educational needs of a growing number of students experiencing homelessness due to the impact of the pandemic on employment, availability of shelter, and the

affordability of housing for families. This study was by no means an evaluation of the ARP-HCY program or the regular federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (ECHY) program. The study did not evaluate specific activities, such as by matching students experiencing homelessness who received certain kinds or amounts of interventions with those who did not.

This study provides information about how states and districts used this opportunity to better identify and serve students experiencing homelessness with educational supports and outcomes in mind. While the phased research design offered a robust means of data collection, several limitations impacted the scope and completeness of the findings. Differences in the timing of when ARP-HCY funds were provided to states, and in turn to districts, led to staggered program implementation timelines across SEAs and LEAs. Also, this study did not cover the full period of ARP-HCY. All ARP-HCY funds needed to be obligated by September 30, 2024, but states and districts that obligated the funds by then could continue to provide supports through contracts. Furthermore, the administrative data analyzed in this report were only through SY 2022-23 since SY 2023-24 data had not been submitted by states at the time of this report. Additionally, COVID-19-related challenges may have influenced both the variability of program delivery and the depth of data available across study sites. Lastly, various limitations affected each of the phases of the study design and are described in their respective sections of the forthcoming final report. These limitations are acknowledged as factors that may have shaped the interpretation of the findings. They reflect practical challenges faced by SEAs and LEAs in a dynamic educational environment and underscore the importance of continued monitoring and adaptation of student services for those experiencing homelessness.

The findings of this study highlight several key areas for future research, primarily centered on the sustainability of the ARP-HCY program after the funding period ends. These areas of future research include investigating how LEAs adapt to the end of funding and continue offering support for students experiencing homelessness after the expiration of funds. Further examination into the impact of partnerships between LEAs, SEAs, and CBOs on long-term success can assess whether these collaborations created lasting benefits that extend beyond the funding period and how they can inform future partnership models. Additionally, there is a need to consider how technical assistance can evolve to continue strengthening the ARP-HCY program's efforts and ensure the sustainability of relationships and protocols established during the program. Addressing these areas can provide valuable insights into sustaining and improving similar programs in the future, ensuring that investments made during the funding period will lead to enduring outcomes.