



CONNECTICUT COALITION to
END HOMELESSNESS

ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

**A TOOLKIT FOR CONNECTICUT
SCHOOLS**



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INTRODUCTION

Schools are important allies in efforts to identify and address youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Connecticut is working towards a future where students, faculty and staff are aware of the laws regarding homeless students, know the fundamentals of Connecticut's system of coordinated access, and have access to content that helps foster discussion and raise awareness.

McKinney-Vento liaisons, guidance counselors, social workers, administrators, school boards, students, and staff within school districts play a vital role in ending homelessness in our communities. The goal is to help integrate these allies into networks of providers and organizations that are focused on ending youth homelessness by 2020.

Building on the momentum of efforts to engage schools from the [CT Youth Count!](#) in 2017 and 2018 and with the intent of expanding homelessness awareness to an increasing amount of school districts, the following toolkit has been created. The various components of this toolkit are included in response to recommendations from front-line staff in schools, Connecticut State Department of Education partners, federal partners from the National Center for Homeless Education, and [Youth Engagement Team Initiative](#) (YETI) participants statewide.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance act mandates that each school district will have a homeless liaison that will be responsible for working on homeless education issues for students. McKinney-Vento liaisons are often the front line for identification and verification of a youth's homeless status. The support of the liaison within the school and broader community is an important component in the efforts to end youth homelessness. A goal of providing this toolkit is to help with an introduction to Coordinated Access (Connecticut's system for accessing services) for the McKinney Ventos and district-wide.

Resources: [McKinney-Vento Act](#)
[Connecticut List of McKinney-Vento Liaisons](#)

STEPS SCHOOLS CAN TAKE

1. Show the videos in the school tools section of this toolkit during an advisory period, assembly, in the classroom, or any other appropriate time, to begin discussions with students and staff about the rights of homeless or unstably housed youth. Leadership by peers regarding the issue of homelessness is vital. Make consistent efforts to outreach to students and student groups to help with these conversations, develop leaders and solicit feedback regarding our system of services. Contact the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) if you need help fostering these relationships.
2. Connect with the local Youth Engagement Team Initiatives (YETI) and begin partnering with them on ending youth homelessness. YETIs are at the center of housing service provision for youth in your region. YETI networks present opportunities to engage with other organizations and partners. Although similar resources exist statewide there are often specific local resources, such as diversion or prevention monies available through local Coordinated Access Networks.

3. Register the school for Hunger & Homeless Awareness Week. This website has multiple ideas for events, templates for communications, and results from previous year's efforts. Let CCEH know if your school is registered and will be participating.

Resource: [Hunger & Homeless Awareness Week Website](#)

4. Prepare the school for participation in the next CT Youth Count! This annual count takes place each January following the Point-In-Time Count and seeks to identify homeless and unstably housed youth across that state; many of whom likely would never have entered homeless shelters. This count is an important data collection event to chart both the barriers and successes in our system of services. The count is also an important outreach event that enlists the scope of community organizations and volunteers to try and enumerate homeless and unstably housed youth.

Resource: [CT Youth Count! Website](#)

5. Use data to help identify homeless youth within school districts. Identifying a youth struggling with homelessness allows schools and partners to then provide supports in order to end that youth's homelessness. The development of the platform to capture and examine data and the protocols schools implement in response to this data is a vital part of a school's response to homelessness.

Resource: [Early Warning Systems to Improve Student Outcomes Flyer](#)

6. Reach out to parents or youth who may be experiencing housing instability or homelessness by posting information flyers around the school.

Resources: [Info Flyer Template for Youth](#)
[Info Flyer Template for Parents](#)

SCHOOL TOOLS

The Institute for Community Research, along with the Coalition to End Homelessness, Connecticut State Department of Education, Center for Children’s Advocacy, National Center for Homeless Education, and the Partnership for Strong Communities, created these videos, lesson plans, and discussion guides, to help schools explain educational rights and protections under the McKinney-Vento Act to students.

Youth who are struggling with an unstable housing situation or homelessness have rights under the McKinney-Vento Act. This lesson plan includes a video about these rights along with a follow-up that will encourage discussion. School districts have amended content to fit the level of discussion they are planning. Faculty, staff and students statewide have all used forms of this lesson plan to increase awareness of homeless services.

[Eligibility for McKinney-Vento School Benefits Video](#)



[The Right to Choose Your School Under McKinney-Vento Law Video](#)



[The Right to Enroll Immediately Under McKinney-Vento Law Video](#)



Resources: [Lesson Plan](#)
[Discussion Guide](#)

CREATIVE USES OF THIS TOOLKIT: SUCCESSES FROM CT SCHOOLS

Meriden School District

Meriden, CT

Efforts to work with and through schools were elevated by the participation of the Meriden School District. With leadership and participation from students, faculty and the superintendent, the Institute for Community Research, the Partnership for Strong Communities, and other partners, three short videos were created featuring youth from Meriden schools who demonstrated common scenarios confronting unaccompanied youth within a school setting. These videos help to explain barriers and concerns homeless students are faced with while attending school. They continue to be used statewide as a training tool for districts and serve as an example of schools and other agencies collaborating in a shared goal of ending homelessness.

Resource: [Endorsement Letter from Superintendent Mark Benigni of Meriden Public School](#)

Norwich Free Academy | Norwich, CT

McKinney-Vento liaison for the district Joanne Zenowitz led faculty and staff at Norwich Free Academy, in partnering with their local Youth Service Bureau [Norwich Youth and Family Services](#) (NYFS) and the Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH). NYFS introduced the Youth Engagement Team Initiatives (YETI) and discussed ways Norwich Free Academy could become further involved in ending homelessness in their schools. CCEH trained a large cohort of Norwich faculty and staff, including those from the Information Technology Department, on how to administer the [CT Youth Count!](#) survey in their district. The district participated in the 2018 count with the survey appearing on numerous tablets throughout the Norwich schools that week.

Bloomfield High School | Bloomfield, CT

The Greater Hartford YETI reached out to Bloomfield schools and began building a relationship with the McKinney-Vento Liaison, Wendy Shepard-Bannish. Wendy then sought to ensure that guidance counselors and social workers knew about the CT Youth Count! and was able to bring the YETI team into the school during the count with a volunteer to conduct the surveys. Bloomfield High School was very happy with the results in taking these steps towards addressing homelessness in their school by bringing the YETI into the school and facilitating the count. In response, Bloomfield had CCEH attend a district-wide professional development day in February, 2018 where they trained 28 staff over three, one hour sessions on coordinated entry, data on homeless or unstably housed youth, the Greater Hartford YETI, the count and some general guidelines about the McKinney-Vento laws. This partnership between Bloomfield High School, the Greater Hartford YETI, and CCEH also facilitated a new partnership CCEH and the Bloomfield library in addressing youth homelessness.

Woodstock Academy | Woodstock, CT

Woodstock Academy's utilization of this school toolkit began through an established, student-led, non-profit called FRESH ([Family Related Effective Solutions for Humanity](#)). The faculty representative for the club Sara Dziedzic, directed her students to review and critically engage with the content of the toolkit with the goal of students being able to present the discussion guide with their peers through advisory sessions. FRESH then presented the content to the whole school during an advisory period in November. This awareness and engagement set the stage for a very successful CT Youth Count! with nearly 200 surveys completed in a school of just over 1000.

If you have a success story you would like to share or would like to hear more about how your school can get involved, please contact info@cceh.org.

TIPS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

School Counselors can be vital members of a youth's support network. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act includes a requirement for school counselors to support students experiencing homelessness with college readiness. In their roles, school counselors can help identify students in a housing crisis and facilitate services and interventions to support their college and career preparation.

The FAFSA

Students who are homeless and unaccompanied can qualify for independent student status on the FAFSA form. The form (in paper or electronic version) can be challenging for youth with histories of homelessness to know how to complete. There are questions that refer to guardianship, dependency, history of homelessness and age and eligibility for services, among others.

10 Tips for Secondary School Counselors to Help Students Experiencing Homelessness Prepare for College

1. Regardless of your school population, include information on your website about the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness and the rights and supports available to McKinney-Vento eligible students. Include links about financial aid opportunities tailored to students who are low-income, living in poverty, or experiencing homelessness, as well as first-generation college students.
2. Provide tailored individual college and career counseling and advisement for students experiencing homelessness. Don't assume that one size fits all!
3. Educate all students early in high school about financial aid options, including grants, loans, work study programs, and scholarships. This will increase students' ability to see college as a goal that is accessible and attainable for them. (Even better, begin to introduce this concept in middle school!)
4. Identify a general list of institutions that are a good fit for students experiencing homelessness. Assess students' need for employment and job opportunities, housing, transportation, counseling, disability support, and additional academic supports such as tutoring programs. Advise students on how to apply to colleges where they can easily access the services they need, and know which universities offer year-round housing.
5. Be proactive in reaching out to students who may need fee waivers for Advanced Placement (AP) tests, college entrance exams, ACT or SAT tests, or college applications. Advertise this information widely so students who may qualify do not miss it. Don't wait for students to come to you!
6. Provide transition counseling for students experiencing homelessness who are heading to college. Meet individually with the students to identify supportive resources at the colleges they plan to attend, and encourage them to seek out those resources when they arrive. Educate students about the services colleges offer such as college counseling centers, career centers, academic coaching, tutoring programs, academic support/success centers, and more. Teach them soft skills, such as how to communicate with professors.
7. Talk with students about the fears and anxieties they may have related to going to college. Provide strengths-based social and emotional counseling to help them become empowered to seek resources for support at the college level. Discuss how they can work through the challenges they may face in being a first-generation college student (if that is the case).
8. Seek training on homelessness and work closely with the local liaison to identify students and provide services.
9. Coordinate college readiness programs that include students who are from homeless situations and first-generation college students. This may include partnering with local universities to have students go on college visits to normalize the college process, and partnering students with mentor college students with whom they can speak candidly about the college admissions process.
10. Beginning freshman year of high school, ensure that students experiencing homelessness have short- and long-term goals that lead them to the completion of high school towards a college and career path where they can be successful. These goals should be reviewed regularly. This may involve providing additional academic support to help students accomplish their goals.

CREDIT ACCRUAL & HOMELESSNESS

Students who make multiple moves between schools often lose credits and this barrier influences overall achievement, esteem, and graduation rates. Per the McKinney-Vento Act, every state must work to ensure that all homeless students receive credit for prior coursework taken.

Resource: [Credit Accrual Tip Sheet](#)

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TEAM INITIATIVES (YETIs)

[Youth Engagement Team Initiatives](#) (YETIs) are the regional work groups that bring together partners working in youth and housing services to end youth homelessness in Connecticut. These work groups are made up of local nonprofits such as shelters as well as local schools and housing providers, outreach workers, and state partners. YETIs are also responsible for organizing and implementing their region's CT Youth Count! Each YETI meets monthly to strategize best practices for provision of services for homeless youth and collaborate with youth service providers from multiple disciplines.

YETIs are one of the best resources and supports for schools seeking to begin ending youth homelessness. YETIs can provide resources, trainings, and support. Contact CCEH (info@cceh.org) to be connected with your local YETI leader.

HELPING YOUTH IN A HOUSING CRISIS

Unaccompanied unstably housed, runaway, or homeless youth



1. CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Homelessness is a crisis and people who are experiencing it need to feel safe. Find a quiet place they feel safe to speak with you. Keep in mind they may have recently experienced trauma such as domestic abuse or sexual violence.



2. ACTIVELY LISTEN

Actively listen to their story by giving your full attention without judgement for their situation. Practice empathy and validate their challenging experiences. While listening, reflect back their strengths and other resources they might have in their lives to help them in this time of crisis.



3. UNDERSTAND

Don't assume what the young person needs - empower them to articulate their needs and share their ideas about solving their housing crisis. Guide them through thinking through their situation by asking open-ended questions.

Question Examples:

- Where did you stay this past week and why are you no longer able to stay there?
- Have you been in this situation before? If so, how did you get out of it?
- Do you have family or friends you can stay with?



4. HELP DEVELOP PLAN

Help them develop a plan to get housed. The plan needs to work for the youth - NOT for us. Be creative in problem solving and explore resources in the community that could help.

THE GOAL: To get them safely housed and connected to services they need.



If you are unable to identify a permanent and safe housing solution with the youth, then proceed to step 5.

5. Dial 2-1-1

United Way's 2-1-1 is a one-stop connection to the local services; housing, utility assistance, food, child care, after school programs, elder care, crisis intervention and much more. Anyone seeking shelter in Connecticut should connect directly with 2-1-1 as this is the entry point into the state's homelessness response system.



This guide should be used to assist people who are encountering unaccompanied young people under 24 years old in a housing crisis. These partners to end youth homelessness include health centers, law enforcement, libraries, city and town offices, educational institutions, etc.

WWW.CCEH.ORG



HELPFUL LINKS

[Youth-Help.org](#) | Connecticut specific youth resources.

[Youth Action Hub](#) | Youth-led center of research and advocacy in Connecticut at the Institute for Community Research.

[School House Connection](#) | Training resource website with public policy updates.

[National Center for Homeless Education](#) | Technical Assistance center for homeless youth and children.

[Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week](#) | Templates, toolkits and examples of both secondary and post-secondary outreach and partnership building.

[CCEH Youth Resources](#) | Connecticut specific resources and trainings.

[Connecticut State Department of Education](#) | McKinney-Vento contacts statewide and explanation of aspects of the McKinney-Vento Act.

[National Network for Youth](#) | Public education and policy advocacy organization addressing youth homelessness.