



Transportation Innovations and Access for Homeless and Highly Mobile Students: *Transit Interventions for Provision of McKinney-Vento Guaranteed Transportation*

I. Background

Within the field of planning, focus on interventions that improve transportation to schools and center equitable access for children and youth are lacking, (Bierbaum, 2024) contributing directly to tardiness and chronic absenteeism for students experiencing homelessness. A lack of consistent transportation can impede students' ability to engage in academic and extracurricular endeavors, severing them from opportunities to stabilize their social circles and generate joy through expressive activities and sport. Transportation is guaranteed to students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento act, both to their School of Origin (SOO) and to associated extracurricular activities, such that LEAs must "provide services to homeless students comparable to those services offered to other students." (CDE, 2021) However, the implementation of McKinney-Vento guaranteed rights can be stifled due to staffing shortages and lack of access to funding, leaving students forced into a state of educational hypermobility – which can result in the loss of 4-6 months of academic progress per move. (CDE, 2021) In fact, students who move schools once are less than 50% as likely to graduate as those who remain in the same school for the duration of high school, (CDE, 2021) a fact with great relevance to the SEH population given that students experiencing homelessness are more than three times as likely to move schools each year than their housing-secure peers. (LPI, 2021) As such, it is critical that interventions be made to secure free and reliable transportation for students experiencing homelessness.

II. Goals and Objectives:

This research explores and documents best practices in transportation access for youth and students experiencing homelessness. Specifically, this landscape analysis documents geographic distribution, funding, eligibility requirements, and stakeholder groups involved in the orchestration and implementation of practice, with the specific objectives of:

- A. Highlighting areas of convergence between transportation planning, education, and housing security for K-12 students.
- B. Identifying opportunities for further research, programming, and funding applications to support transportation needs of students experiencing homelessness.

III. Methods

This research analyzed the efficacy of current policies and practices responding to the transportation needs of unhoused students across the United States and made recommendations for policy and programmatic improvement and innovation.

- Thorough review of existing literature
- Environmental scan of organizational response, focusing on location, operating organization, funding source, eligibility criteria, and current operating status
- Informational interviews with transportation planning professionals and academics
- Analysis of 9 case study programs in California, Oregon, Washington, and Missouri

IV. Key Insights & Findings

- a) Challenges of Self-Identification & Stigma:** Given that HHM students are the only self-identifying special population, it is critical that nominal homelessness status is not a requirement for service. Use of services provided only to HHM students may be stigmatized and prevent children & youth from utilizing transportation services if they feel it is othering or reveals their housing insecure status.
- b) Lack of Longevity:** Many currently operational programs supporting transportation access for students experiencing homelessness are funded by one-time federal ARP-HCY dollars, which have sunset by the time of this brief's publication. While these dollars were useful in enabling temporary innovation, long-term funding must be built into these interventions.
- c) Mobility:** Due to the high mobility of students experiencing homelessness as a population and individuals, significant limitations exist in the provision of transit access at the level of a municipality. County-wide or regional approaches may remedy this by allowing students the same rights and access across jurisdictions during their period(s) of mobility. Further, requirements predicated upon residency (such as designated census tracts) make interventions inaccessible to students without fixed shelter or proper documentation.
- d) Education:** Youth may not be comfortable using public transportation due to lack of prior experience or difficulty wayfinding. While free access to map and transit agency applications on cell phones may be provided, not all youth will be able to access such technology.
- e) Misalignment of Transit Agencies within Region:** In the case of regions or municipalities with multiple operational transit agencies, alignment of access between forms of transportation may not exist. This can pose difficulties for youth who need to utilize multiple forms of transportation.

V. Recommendations

1. Ensure the **provision of free transit to all youth**, regardless of housing status
 - a. Best Practice: [Sacramento RydeFreeRT](#)
2. Build in longevity through **systems-aligned partnerships** with transportation agencies and local government
 - a. Best Practice: [Move Ahead Washington Grant](#)
3. Establish provisions at the **county-agency level** to support highly mobile students who may not remain within city bounds
 - a. Best Practice: [Ventura County Youth Ride Free](#)
4. Require fare-free youth rider policy for **all public grant receiving agencies**
 - a. Best Practice: [Move Ahead Washington Grant](#)