



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: Combating Absenteeism before It Starts: McKinney-Vento Team Summer Cookouts
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Program Overview

To increase early identification and help prepare students experiencing homelessness for school, the Henrico County Public Schools McKinney-Vento team planned and facilitated three summer engagement events at hotels across Henrico County. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the main piece of federal legislation dealing with the education of youth experiencing homelessness. The HCPS events, patterned after family summer cookouts, were designed to assist families experiencing homelessness enroll students in HCPS schools. The McKinney-Vento events were designed to help families secure school transportation and get the school supplies, clothing, shoes, hygiene products and food they need while connecting with service providers in our community. Not only were the events successful — there was a double-digit increase in the number of students identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento before the first day of school — but they were a great example of the importance of collaboration among school divisions, other county government agencies and community partners. As a bonus, the events provided an opportunity for students and families alike to briefly step away from the stress of homelessness and enjoy an afternoon of food, fun and games.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

In school leadership, chronic absenteeism is a problem. As schools work to maintain accreditation and fulfill school quality plans, it is viewed as a problem. To adequately address chronic absenteeism, professionals must recognize that chronic absenteeism is a symptom, especially for students experiencing homelessness. Be it high mobility, lack of transportation, lack of sleep, lack of food, lack of hygiene, or fear of bullying due to appearance, the feeling of defeat due to being behind, a sense of shame stemming from misinformed judgments — the trauma associated with homelessness affects students' emotional health, physical health and their preparedness for school.

There is, of course, a high correlation between school attendance and future success — but what does the data show when poor attendance intersects with homelessness? Lower test scores and

higher rates of students not advancing to the next grade. However, as chronic absenteeism is the symptom of a greater problem, so are these. The cause is not just a student being homeless — it is a student who is homeless and who is also chronically absent.

National research shows that students who are homeless tend to be chronically absent at twice the rate of their peers with stable housing. Henrico County Public Schools students under McKinney-Vento are no exception. During the 2021-22 school year, the division identified 18.8% of students as chronically absent, while 46% of HCPS students eligible for McKinney-Vento were identified as chronically absent. When looking at the data further, the HCPS McKinney-Vento Team noted that of the 46%, a third of those students were already chronically absent before being evaluated for McKinney-Vento eligibility. Because the first step in decreasing chronic absenteeism is early identification, the HCPS McKinney-Vento team focused on engagement and identification during the summer months so that more students experiencing homelessness would be identified, supported and ready to attend school on Day 1 of the school year.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The program is a model for other localities seeking to use interdepartmental and community collaboration to address the needs of homeless initiatives were not only successful, as evidenced by the 16% increase in the early identification of students over two years, the events were models of collaboration. Community-based service organizations, local faith-based groups, Henrico County and state government agencies, Richmond Public Schools and various Henrico County Public Schools departments came together to interact with and provide services and resources to students and families. While the events were funded via a special federal grant award that directly responded to the pandemic, the team has ensured that the events will continue through at least the summer of 2026 — without any cost outlay from the school division.

In addition to meeting their goal and building collaboration among agencies and departments, the summer engagement events also provided fun, nourishing food, community connection, resource collection and relationship-building with school personnel. They were also a time to simply

breathe, relax, exhale and be free from the trauma of homelessness, even for a few hours on a bright, sunny summer afternoon.

How Program Was Carried Out

On March 11, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, which included \$800 million to address the needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness. In direct response to the decreased numbers of students found eligible for McKinney-Vento during the pandemic, the main goal of these American Rescue Plan funds was to help state and local educational agencies identify children and youth experiencing homelessness. Using a competitive grant from the Virginia state McKinney-Vento office, the HCPS McKinney-Vento team was awarded funding and began work on a summer engagement plan to increase the number of students identified as eligible under McKinney-Vento before the first day of the 2022-23 school year.

The team hypothesized that because of high mobility and frequent changes of phone numbers and mailing addresses, parents with students experiencing homelessness were not able to stay abreast of information sent by the school division during the summer months. Families may not receive updates on school year start dates, class schedules, technology pickup dates, back-to-school activities and enrollment in services provided by the McKinney-Vento program. Not receiving relevant information would delay school enrollment and hinder attendance. The team also noted that in the previous school year, students identified as eligible under McKinney-Vento after the start of the school year had missed seven to 10 days of school because of a lack of transportation and basic needs. These factors contributed to chronic absenteeism. To prevent the delay of school enrollment and attendance for students experiencing housing instability, the McKinney-Vento team planned a series of summer engagement events in July. The vision for the events was to create a family cookout atmosphere with games, music, dancing, fun-in-the-sun and treats from the grill. Students and families could escape the challenges of survival for a bit, have some fun and build relationships with school staff members. Connecting families to resources and school information would help the students be ready to attend school on Day 1.

The leader of the four-member team was the HCPS family and assessment coordinator for community resources and partnerships.

Because families experiencing homelessness often rely on hotels for housing, the team decided to host the events at hotels throughout Henrico County. In January 2022, the team contacted hotels with the highest concentration of eligible students. With the hotel locations secured, the team purchased event items and equipment.

During February, using funds from the American Rescue Plan, the team purchased tents and tables, oversized outdoor games, grills and iPads and Apple pencils that families could use to complete school enrollment paperwork and needs assessment surveys at the event. The team also ensured that established insurance coverage was sufficient to cover the events and their participants.

During March and April, the team began reaching out to community-based service providers and local faith-based organizations to secure volunteers and resources that regular federal funding would not fund, such as nonperishable grocery items, crockpots, hot plates, cooking utensils, mini microwaves and full-sized hygiene products. The team also began meeting with community business partners and area non-profit organizations collecting donations of backpacks and school supplies.

In May and June, the team worked to recruit volunteers to assist at each event. More than 60 people volunteered their time to greet and engage with families at the hotels. Volunteers came from Dominion Energy; EverDriven Transportation; the HCPS departments of Federal Programs, Foundational Learning, and Family and Community Engagement; Mercy Mall of Greater Richmond; Life Church RVA; and friends and family members of the McKinney-Vento team. At the end of June, the team created fliers and distributed them to area hotels, inviting families to attend.

The team considered the planning successful, identifying 36 students as eligible for McKinney-Vento. Compared to the previous summer, the events contributed to a 1% increase in the number of students identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento before the first day of school. While not a

large increase, the events were in their first year and were a move in the right direction to head off chronic absenteeism. American Rescue Plan funds were available for use through September 2024. With the successful completion of the July 2022 events, the team knew that July 2023 could see larger impacts.

During the summer of 2022, even though the events were held at hotels in Henrico County, the team met McKinney-Vento-eligible students whose home school was in the Richmond Public Schools division. Rather than enrolling in Henrico County Public Schools, some families wanted to maintain their students' enrollment in RPS. So, for the summer 2023 events, the HCPS team reached out to that school division's Center for Families in Transition team and invited them to have a presence at the events. They agreed and had staff members present at each July 2023 event to identify and enroll RPS students in their McKinney-Vento program. The RPS team identified and enrolled 33 students who may have otherwise not been ready to attend on the first day of school.

The HCPS team wanted other vendors present during the events and reached out to additional community-based service providers and worked closely with other Henrico County agencies and HCPS departments. Twenty-two vendors and organizational representatives were present at the events. Community organizations were focusing on mental and emotional health, teen development, stopping hunger and job-readiness. HCPS Library Services was present to facilitate STEAM activities for students and connect students and families to the programs offered at Henrico County public libraries.

The Henrico County Department of Social Services was present to help connect families to support. Vendors were representative of strong collaboration among HCPS departments: the pre-K enrollment team helped families register their little ones for their first school experience, the Department of School Counseling answered questions about enrollment and services for students, the HCPS Department of Student Wellness and Support Team was represented to answer questions about mental health services and programs, the HCPS Parent-Educator Resource Center provided information about family educational opportunities, the Department of

Student Health answered questions about physicals and immunizations. The HCPS Summer Engagement team went door-to-door in the hotels, inviting students and families to join the fun. The volunteers also included principals and counselors from neighborhood schools. Even employees from the Virginia Department of Social Services helped out.

To increase attendance at the events, the HCPS McKinney-Vento team expanded promotion. Flyers were sent to the last known address of every student identified during the 2022-23 school year and were posted in every hotel where students had been found eligible during the previous three school years. Flyers were provided to the members of the HCPS Summer Engagement teams who conducted home visits in neighborhoods where chronic absenteeism had been a concern in the previous year. The HCPS McKinney-Vento team also called families whose students they thought might be eligible for services under McKinney-Vento for the 2023-24 school year.

American Rescue Act funding covers events through the summer of 2024. However, with the success of the previous two years, the HCPS McKinney-Vento Team has been awarded grants to continue the events through at least 2026.

Financing and Staffing

For the 2022 events, the team spent \$12,561, which covered the purchase of 10 iPads, Apple pencils and protective cases, two grills, four 10x10 tents, four 30 x 72 bifold tables, surge protectors, extension cords, three oversized outdoor games, food, drinks and cooking and serving supplies.

For the 2023 events the team spent \$1,096 on food, drinks, and cooking and food service supplies.

For future events, \$3,000 will be set aside annually to pay for food, cooking and food service supplies, additional tents and tables, and industrial fans for cooling stations.

Program Results

The events of summer 2022 resulted in the enrollment and identification of 36 students under McKinney-Vento, a 1% increase over the previous school year of students identified as eligible for McKinney-Vento before the first day of school.

In summer 2023, with expanded promotion, inclusion of vendors and increased collaboration among division departments, the events recorded 150 student interactions — with 114 HCPS students eligible for services under McKinney-Vento. Thirty-three of those were eligible for services with Richmond Public Schools. For the HCPS McKinney-Vento Office, the events yielded a 14% increase in the number of students identified as eligible before the start of the 2023-24 school year.

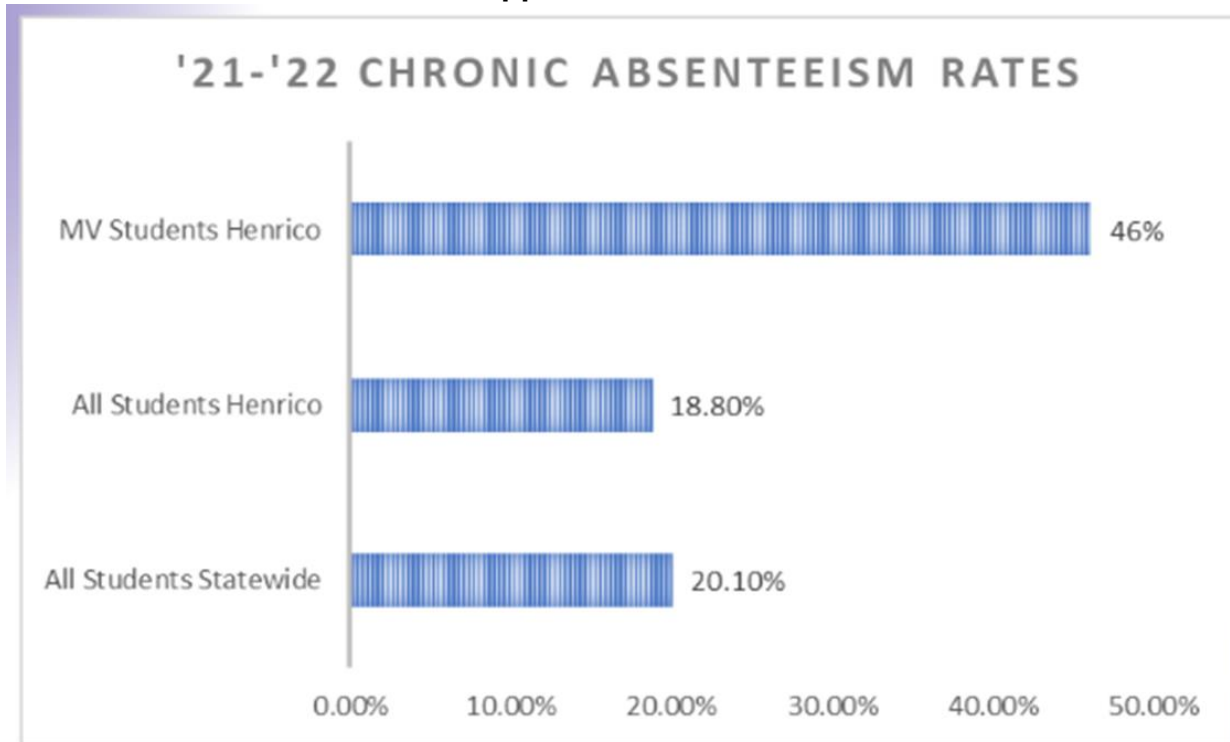
The early identification of students at the events and addressing basic needs such as clothing, shoes, hygiene and school supplies yielded remarkable results. In the first quarter of the 2023-24 school year, these students attended school at a rate of 90% — less than five percentage points behind their peers with stable housing. At the end of the first semester of 2023-24, these students are maintaining an attendance rate of nearly 90%, compared to 94% percent for the HCPS student population as a whole!

Brief Summary

To increase early identification and help prepare students experiencing homelessness for school, the Henrico County Public Schools McKinney-Vento team planned and facilitated three summer engagement events at hotels across Henrico County. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is the main piece of federal legislation dealing with the education of youth experiencing homelessness. The HCPS events, patterned after family summer cookouts, were designed to assist families experiencing homelessness enroll students in HCPS schools. The McKinney-Vento events were designed to help families secure school transportation and get the school supplies, clothing, shoes, hygiene products and food they need while connecting with service providers in our community. Not only were the events successful — there was a double-

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Combating Absenteeism before It Starts: McKinney-Vento Team Summer Cookouts Supplemental Material



Students who are homeless are chronically absent at twice the rate of their stably-housed peers.

The number one factor in determining whether or not a student breaks the cycle of homelessness as a young adult is the completion of their K-12 education. However, national research also shows that students who are homeless tend to be chronically absent at twice the rate of their peers with stable housing. Henrico County students under McKinney-Vento are no exception to that statistic. The data above is from the 2021-22 school year, where HCPS McKinney-Vento students were chronically absent at more than twice the rate of their peers with stable housing.

Summer Pop-Ups Events '23

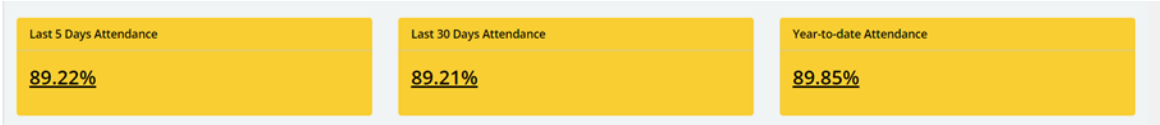


Summer Pop-Up Events '23

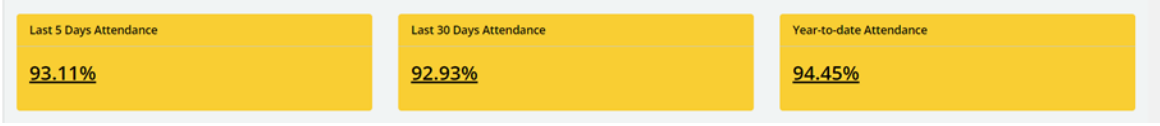


Summer 2023 saw the addition of 22 vendors, adding community-based service providers, including the Richmond Public Schools McKinney-Vento team, so that they could meet their students and ensure educational continuity for them as well. The volunteer base expanded and the team was supported by the efforts of the divisionwide plan for summer engagement. This was accomplished through a collaboration between the HCPS departments of Student Support and Wellness, Family and Community Engagement and Federal Programs and Foundational Learning.

During the three July events, 150 student interactions were recorded, identifying 114 students as eligible under McKinney-Vento with Henrico County Public Schools and 33 as eligible for McKinney-Vento with Richmond Public Schools, ensuring more students were ready on Day 1 for the 2023-24 school year.



Overview of attendance rate for students identified at Summer Engagement/Enrollment Events



Overview of attendance rate for HCPS students as a whole