



**Topic: HomeRoom Network Community of Practice
Session 7 – Maintaining and Sustaining Nutrition Services for Students
Experiencing Homelessness**

Date: 2/14/2023

Time: 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm EST

Materials

Presentation Slides: <https://cohhio.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Session-7-2023.pdf>

Recording: <https://youtu.be/0ZsUK39stFY>

1. Food Insecurity and Trauma
 - a. The USDA defines food insecurity as: “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways”
 - b. Food insecurity is a form of trauma. Youth experiencing food insecurity may experience a variety of physical, mental, and emotional side effects such as:
 - i. Difficulty concentrating and absorbing information
 - ii. Difficulty socializing in school
 - iii. Anxiety about food, impacting the ability to develop food regulation skills
 - iv. Being prone to risky behaviors in order to access food
2. Eligibility for Free School Meals
 - a. Students experiencing homelessness are categorically eligible for free school meals through the Richard B Russell National School Lunch Act
 - i. USDA policies allow for automatic enrollment of these students, which is known as “direct certification,” to ensure they receive meals quickly
 - ii. Necessary documentation includes:
 1. The student’s name
 2. A signed statement from the local homeless education liaison or the director of a homeless shelter where the student resides indicating the student has been determined to be experiencing homelessness
 - iii. School meals personnel do not have discretion to decline directly certifying children who have been documented to be categorically eligible
3. Confidentiality
 - a. Information about a student’s free meal eligibility status is confidential and may not be shared without parental consent; other than the following exceptions:
 - i. Sharing information with school lunch and breakfast programs at other schools/school districts when a student changes schools



- ii. Sharing name and meal eligibility status with persons connected directly with the administration or enforcement of a federal education program
 - iii. Disclosing a student's name and meal eligibility status to persons connected directly with the administration or enforcement of a federal, state, or local means-tested nutrition program with eligibility standards comparable to those of the school meals program
 - iv. Disclosing a student's name and meal eligibility status to Medicaid or the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)
4. Frequently Asked Questions
- a. Are schools without school meal programs obligated to provide food to students experiencing homelessness?
 - i. No. If a school does not have a federal meal program, there is no obligation to provide students with food. Many schools, however, choose to provide students with food through collaborations with other schools and community partners.
 - b. Are private schools obligated to provide food to their students experiencing homelessness, or is the local public school district obligated to provide meals to those students?
 - i. No. Private schools are not obligated to provide meals to their students, and public schools are not obligated to provide meals to students experiencing homelessness that attend private schools.
 - c. How should unpaid meal fees from before a student is identified as homeless be handled?
 - i. Regardless of past fees, every student identified as homeless is categorically eligible for free meals. There can be no delay in providing free meals to students who meet the relevant eligibility criteria due to unpaid fees.
 - d. If a student experiencing homelessness changes schools, does the student continue to receive free school meals in the new school?
 - i. Once a child is certified as eligible to receive free school meals, eligibility remains effective for the remainder of the school year and continues for up to 30 days of the subsequent school year or until a new eligibility determination is made.
5. Professional Development
- a. Nutrition and cafeteria personnel can play an important role in identifying children experiencing homelessness who have not yet been in contact with the local liaison.
 - b. Many local liaisons provide training for child nutrition personnel, registrars, and other school and district staff members who may be in a position to ensure that eligible students are receiving free school meals. These trainings should cover:
 - i. Common signs of homelessness
 - ii. How to refer children to the local liaison



- iii. Local procedures for connecting eligible students to free school meals and other services
6. Comparable Services
 - a. The McKinney-Vento Act states that homeless students have the right to services comparable to those offered to other students.
 - b. Districts must provide students experiencing homelessness with nutrition services equivalent to those provided to permanently housed students.
7. Discussion: Nutrition Services
 - a. What challenges is your district facing in providing nutrition services to students experiencing homelessness?
 - b. How do you work with your nutrition and cafeteria personnel to identify students experiencing homelessness?
 - c. Does your district have specific nutrition services available for unaccompanied homeless youths?
8. Providing Food After School and on Weekends
 - a. To support students' access to adequate food, school districts should consider strategies for ensuring food access when school is not in session, such as:
 - i. Collaborating with community partners
 - ii. Connecting families to additional resources
 - iii. Creating a school or district food pantry
9. Barriers to Sending Home Cafeteria Leftovers
 - a. Food safety: schools are required to produce, serve, and store food in conjunction with state and local health codes to maintain the highest level of food safety and sanitation for meals consumed on-site
 - b. Reimbursement: The national school lunch program regulations intend that reimbursable meals are to be served and consumed as part of the school program, or on school or school-related premises.
 - i. Sending food home with a child would constitute a non-program food that is not reimbursable and could not be covered federal NSLP funds.
 - c. Confidentiality: schools must be careful not to overtly identify or disclose a student's eligibility
10. Community Collaborations
 - a. Community-based organizations can play a unique and valuable role in providing nutrition services to students experiencing homelessness after school and on weekends by:
 - i. Providing donations for school or district food pantries
 - ii. Creating weekend or summer food programs
 - b. Potential partners include:
 - i. Food banks
 - ii. Faith-based organizations
 - iii. Civic groups
 - iv. Grocery stores
 - v. Restaurants



11. Working with Families

- a. Liaisons can work with families to help them access food outside of school hours by:
 - i. Helping them apply for SNAP benefits that can be used to buy food at grocery stores, certain retail stores, and some restaurants
 1. Unaccompanied homeless youths are also eligible for SNAP benefits
 - ii. Referring students and families to after-school programs, daycare centers, and emergency shelters that provide food through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
 1. Contact your state CACFP agency, ODE, to apply for funds for your program or locate a participating facility

12. Funding

- a. When other sources of food are unavailable, districts may use Title 1, Part A funds and McKinney-Vento subgrant funds to pay for food
 - i. Title I, Part A: Purchasing food is an allowable use of Title I, Part A set-aside funds whenever reasonable and necessary to enable students experiencing homelessness to take advantage of educational opportunities and when funding is not reasonably available from another source.
 - ii. McKinney-Vento Sub-Grant Funds: McKinney-Vento subgrant funds can be used to provide food to attract, engage, and retain students experiencing homelessness in public school programs and services, as well as on an emergency basis to enable them to attend school.
- b. ARP-HCY funds should NOT be used for food purchases except for emergency/extraordinary situations

13. Considerations

- a. It's important to ensure that the food districts and community partners provide to students and families experiencing homelessness can meet their needs. When providing nutrition services, the following should be considered:
 - i. Is the food being provided in an accessible location?
 - ii. Can the food being provided be made easily, or does it require appliances the family may not have access to?
 - iii. Does the food provided represent a variety of different food groups?
 - iv. Is the food provided culturally appropriate for its recipients?
 - v. Is the food provided in a way that does not stigmatize the student?

14. Discussion: Providing Food After School and on Weekends

- a. *How does your district meet the nutrition needs of students experiencing homelessness outside of school hours?*
- b. *Where might there be opportunities for collaboration when it comes to providing nutrition services for students experiencing homelessness?*

