

RCW 28A.300.542 Students experiencing homelessness—Grant process to identify students and district capacity for support—Award criteria—Districts' responsibilities—Report. (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall create a competitive grant process to evaluate and award state-funded grants to school districts to increase identification of students experiencing homelessness and the capacity of the districts to provide support for students experiencing homelessness. The goals of the grant process are to:

(a) Provide educational stability for students experiencing homelessness by promoting housing stability; and
(b) Encourage the development of collaborative strategies between education and housing partners.

(2) (a) Funds may be used in a manner that is complementary to federal McKinney-Vento funds and consistent with allowable uses as determined by the office of the superintendent of public instruction. The process must complement any similar federal grant program or programs in order to minimize agency overhead and administrative costs for the superintendent of public instruction and school districts.

(b) Examples of permitted student supports and activities include, but are not limited to:

(i) Direct academic supports, including tutoring and additional transportation costs;

(ii) Basic needs, including retail store cards, nutrition supports, and hygiene items;

(iii) Wraparound supports, including contracting with community-based providers, behavioral and physical health supports, and housing-related supports, such as bedding and short-term hotel or motel stays, that meet a student's emergent needs and allow the student to fully participate in school;

(iv) Employment supports for students and families; and

(v) Out-of-school enrichment activities, such as an academic tutor provided at a shelter.

(3) School districts may access both federal and state funding to identify and support students experiencing homelessness and are encouraged to use grant dollars to leverage community resources and strengthen relationships with community-based partners.

(4) Award criteria for the state grants must be based on the demonstrated need of the school district and may consider the number or overall percentage, or both, of homeless children and youths enrolled in preschool, elementary, and secondary schools in the school district, and the ability of the local school district to meet these needs. Award criteria for these must also be based on the quality of the applications submitted. Selected grantees must reflect geographic diversity across the state. Greater weight must be given to districts that demonstrate a commitment to:

(a) Partnering with local community-based organizations with experience in serving the needs of students experiencing homelessness or students of color, with a preference for organizations that focus on equitable housing and homeless strategies;

(b) Serving the needs of unaccompanied youth; and

(c) Implementing evidence-informed strategies to address the opportunity gap and other systemic inequities that negatively impact students experiencing homelessness and students of color. Specific strategies may include, but are not limited to:

(i) Enhancing the cultural responsiveness of current and future staff;

(ii) Ensuring all staff, faculty, and school employees are actively trained in trauma-informed care;

(iii) Providing inclusive programming by intentionally seeking and utilizing input from the population being served;

(iv) Using a multidisciplinary approach when serving students experiencing homelessness and their families;

(v) Intentionally seeking and utilizing input from the families and students experiencing homelessness about how district policies, services, and practices can be improved; and

(vi) Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in eliminating disparities in academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness with their housed peers.

(5) At the end of each academic year, districts receiving grants shall monitor and report on the academic outcomes for students served by the grants. The academic outcomes are those recommended by the office of the superintendent of public instruction. The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall review the reports submitted by the districts and assist school districts in using these data to identify gaps and needs, and develop sustainable strategies to improve academic outcomes for students experiencing homelessness.

(6) Students experiencing homelessness are defined as students without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence in accordance with the definition of homeless children and youths in the federal McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 11431 through 11435.

(7) School districts may not use funds allocated under this section to supplant existing federal, state, or local resources for supports for students experiencing homelessness, which may include education liaisons.

(8) Grants awarded to districts under this section may be for two years.

(9) The office of the superintendent of public instruction and the department of commerce shall:

(a) Collaborate on shared goals and outcomes under the grant process established by this section and the grant program established in RCW 43.185C.340; and

(b) Beginning in 2024, and every two years thereafter, jointly produce and make publicly available a report on the goals and outcomes of the grant process established by this section and the grant program established in RCW 43.185C.340. [2023 c 386 § 1; 2019 c 412 § 1; 2016 c 157 § 2.]

Finding—Intent—Short title—2016 c 157: See notes following RCW 28A.300.540.