

# Supporting College Access and Success for Students Experiencing Homelessness

The federal [McKinney-Vento Act](#) requires that:

- o [Liaisons](#) ensure that school personnel working with students who are homeless **receive professional development**;
- o School districts ensure that youth who are homeless don't face barriers to accessing academic and **extracurricular activities** and are provided with transportation if needed;
- o School districts award full or **partial credit for coursework** satisfactorily completed at a prior school;
- o School districts ensure that youths who are homeless **receive individualized college counseling**;
- o [Liaisons](#) ensure that unaccompanied youth who are homeless are told that they can apply for federal financial aid as independent students and are **given verification of their independent student status for purposes of the FAFSA**; and
- o [Liaisons](#) ensure that youth are referred to **housing services**.



The following activities outline ways in which school districts and [McKinney-Vento liaisons](#) can meet the responsibilities described above. [Liaisons](#) cannot do all these activities on their own! Coordination among school district staff and their partners is critical to ensuring that students experiencing homelessness get the support they need to graduate and pursue post-secondary opportunities.

## Identification and College Prep

- Provide training to high school guidance counselors and college counselors about their role in identifying students experiencing homelessness and supporting them access college.**

- Ensure that students who are MV eligible:**

- **have course schedules that put them on track to graduate,**
- **have access to summer school if needed, and**
- **are provided with *partial credit* for any coursework successfully completed at a prior school.**

**TIP:** Many colleges require that students take remedial classes if they score below 75 on the English Regents exam or below 70 on the Algebra Regents exam, which are higher scores than what is needed for graduating from high school. Encourage students who have lower Regents scores to retake the exams in high school so they can avoid having to take and pay for remedial classes in college.

- Ensure that students who are MV eligible are encouraged to participate in and have access to extracurricular activities, including transportation.**

**TIP:** Use Title I set-aside funds to pay for any fees or needed transportation so that students who are MV eligible can participate in extracurricular activities.

- Ensure 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> graders who are MV eligible individually meet with a guidance or college counselor to discuss college prep and access and/or to explore career options and other postsecondary programs outside of college.**

### TIPS:

- *Help students who are MV eligible find the best postsecondary fit and match (academically, socially, and financially).*
- *Make sure that students who are MV eligible and who are college-ready consider 4-year colleges, not just 2-year ones. More intensive student engagement and on-campus housing at 4-year colleges can provide much needed stability and support for students who are MV eligible.*
- *For students who are unsure or not interested in college:*
  - ✓ Use the National Center for Homeless Education's [Education Goals and Supports: A Guided Discussion Tool](#), which has links to career assessments and many other resources, to help explore student's interests and skills and how they want to use them in the future;
  - ✓ Use **career assessment tools** such as [My Next Move: Interest Profiler](#) and [CareerZone](#);
  - ✓ Refer students to the local [Educational Opportunity Center](#) to explore other postsecondary options.

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible are awarded fee reductions for *Advanced Placement (AP) exams* and any remaining costs are covered (Title I set-aside funding can be used).

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible:

- register for SAT/ACT exams,
- apply for SAT/ACT fee waivers, and
- are provided transportation if the test is not going to be held at the school building (Title I set-aside can be used).

**ACT:**

- [Test Center Locations](#)
- [Fee Waiver Information](#)

**SAT:**

- [Online Registration](#)
- [Fee Waiver Information](#)

- ❑ Ensure students who are MV eligible are enrolled in *prep for SAT-ACT* (Title I set-aside can be used).

*TIP: Encourage students who are MV eligible to create a Khan Academy account and link it to their College Board account for free and customized [PSAT and SAT prep](#).*

- ❑ Connect students who are MV eligible with college access programs and other supports that can help them with choosing which colleges to apply to, college tours, applying to college, and applying for financial aid.

*TIP: Refer students to:*

- a local **Upward Bound** program;
- a local college access program listed through the [National College Access Network \(NCAN\)](#);
- A **NYS Financial Aid Administrators Association (NYSFAAA)** volunteer for help with FAFSA and TAP. Contact Lisa Simpson (518-473-0842) to see if there is an available NYSFAAA volunteer
- [College Greenlight](#) provides free information and resources to students and school counselors to better connect first generation and underrepresented students with colleges and scholarships.

## College Application

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible *identify teachers who can write letters of recommendation* and that they request such letters.

*TIP: Speak with students about the importance of letters of recommendation for college and the criteria for a student requesting and receiving a letter.*

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible have *support from a staff member in school and peers* who can review and offer feedback on their college applications and essays, and scholarship applications.

*TIP: Explore peer-to-peer support with the college application process, such as [Student Success Centers](#).*

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible apply for [college application fee waivers](#).

- ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible apply for several colleges at once through:

- [applySUNY Application](#) for SUNY 4-year universities and technical universities.
- [Common Application](#) for private colleges.

*TIP: Advise the student not to use the applySUNY application for community colleges if the student is applying to 7 or more SUNY colleges. The applySUNY fee waiver can only be used for up to 7 colleges. Advise the student to **apply directly to the community college and avoid any fees**.*

- ❑ **Ensure students who are MV eligible get support with meeting deadlines for college applications and financial aid.**

**TIP:** Encourage youth to sign up for [Up Next](#) by **texting their First and Last Names to 240-623-8319**. Up Next sends text reminders about applying for college and financial aid, receiving financial aid, and paying back student loans after graduation.

## Financial Aid/Scholarships

- ❑ **Help students who are MV eligible [submit a FAFSA](#) to apply for federal financial aid.**
- ❑ **Identify all 12<sup>th</sup> graders who are unaccompanied homeless youth; *inform them that they are eligible to apply as independent students for purposes of federal financial aid and provide verification of independent student status.***

**TIP:** Template verification letter can be found here: [SHC Verification Letter](#). This verification letter is not sufficient to prove independent student status for TAP. See below for more information.

- ❑ **Help students who are MV eligible apply for an award through the [NYS Tuition Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#).**

### TIPS FOR UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH:

- **Independent vs. dependent status:** Independent students get smaller TAP awards than dependent students (approximately \$2,000 less each year). If an unaccompanied homeless youth can safely get their parents' financial information and signature, they may want to explore applying as a dependent student even though they may qualify as an independent student.
- **Proving independent status:** If an unaccompanied homeless youth applies for TAP as an independent student, the youth usually must show that there has been "an involuntary dissolution of their family resulting in relinquishment of their parents' responsibility and control." The template verification letter mentioned above is not enough to prove independent student status for TAP. To show involuntary dissolution, the student should submit a statement from someone like a McKinney-Vento liaison, a social worker, a legal aid representative, caseworker, or member of the clergy relating to the youth's family circumstances. For more information see: [TAP FAQs](#).

- ❑ **Help students who are MV eligible identify and *apply for other available scholarships.***

- [SchoolHouse Connection Youth Scholarship](#)
- [Horatio Alger Scholarship](#)
- [Fastweb!](#)
- [College Board](#)
- **Excelsior Scholarship. Note:** The Excelsior Scholarship is a "last dollar scholarship." This means that if the student is receiving TAP and Pell grant awards and those cover the cost of tuition, the student will be ineligible for an Excelsior Scholarship.
- **CSS PROFILE:** Students applying to many private colleges must complete a College Scholarship Service PROFILE (CSS PROFILE), in addition to the FAFSA, to determine their eligibility for non-federal financial aid.
- [College Greenlight](#) provides free information and resources to students and school counselors to better connect first generation and underrepresented students with colleges and scholarships.

### Additional resources for **undocumented students:**

- [TheDream.US Scholarship](#)
- [New York Immigration Coalition](#)
- [MALDEF Scholarship Resource Guide](#)



## Supporting Students in College

### ❑ Ensure that students who are MV eligible explore *Opportunity programs*.

- [Education Opportunity Program \(EOP\)](#) offered at most SUNY colleges
- [Higher Education Opportunity Program \(HEOP\)](#) offered by many private colleges
- [Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program \(CSTEP\)](#) offered at many SUNY colleges and at some private and community colleges
- [Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge \(SEEK\)](#) offered by most senior CUNY colleges
- [College Discovery \(CD\)](#) and [Accelerated Study in Associate Program \(ASAP\)](#) offered at CUNY community colleges

**TIP:** Help students who are MV eligible connect with supports in college right away, even if they don't enroll in one of these programs. Some students may feel out of place in college and that they don't belong. Encouragement that they do belong and connecting them with supports on campus (for example, help choosing courses) can make an enormous difference in whether the student makes it through college, especially during the first year. For students who need to take remedial classes, explore programs like [CUNY Start](#) so that they are better prepared for college coursework and can save their financial aid for credit courses.

### ❑ Connect students who are MV eligible with resources to help with *housing at college and during college breaks*.

#### TIPS:

- **Housing deposits:** Students who are MV eligible may face barriers to accessing college housing because financial aid is often disbursed after housing deposits are due. Reach out to the college to see if it will waive/reduce/postpone the housing deposit until after the financial aid is disbursed.
- **Gap housing:** Many students who are MV eligible need housing over breaks. Many colleges have housing available to international students and/or student athletes over school breaks. Ask the college if students who are MV eligible can access such housing during breaks.

### ❑ Connect students who are MV eligible with resources and supports at college.

#### TIPS:

- **Transportation:** Many students who are MV eligible work off-campus. Make sure they know whether there is public transportation or transportation offered by the college and whether it is free or if you have to pay for it. For example, some Opportunity programs offer free public transportation passes.
- **Food:** Many students who are MV eligible are food insecure. Make sure they know about free or reduced meal plans and the [local food pantry](#). For example, encourage them to become a Resident Advisor (RA). RAs often get a free college meal plan.
- **Health and Tutoring:** Make sure students who are MV eligible are aware of on-campus supports and how to access them, such as mental health and health services through the student health center, and tutoring and academic support through professor/TA office hours and the academic support center.



For additional information:

- NYS-TEACHS Infoline (800) 388-2014
- National Center for Homeless Education's Issue Brief, [Supporting College Completion for Students Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [SchoolHouse Connection](#)