



# Improving Equity in and Access to Quality CTE Programs for Students Experiencing Homelessness



## Introduction

State Career Technical Education (CTE) leaders have a critical responsibility to ensure that each learner has opportunities to achieve educational and career success and is supported in identifying and realizing their goals. To do so, state leaders must identify and dismantle historical barriers, and construct systems that support each learner in accessing, fully participating in, and successfully completing a high-quality CTE program of study. This brief suggests strategies for how CTE and homeless education leaders can work together to build opportunities for learners experiencing homelessness to access and succeed in high-quality CTE programs of study. Importantly, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) expanded its definition of special populations to include individuals experiencing homelessness, as defined by Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act) [42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)], which provides a clear path for state and local leaders to support these learners more intentionally through CTE programs of study.

Given the United States' continuing lack of affordable housing (Aurand, Emmanuel, Rafi, Threet, & Yentel, 2020), it is not surprising that the number of learners experiencing homeless has increased in recent years. During the 2017-2018 school year, U.S. public schools enrolled 1,508,265 children and youth in PreK through 12th grade experiencing homelessness, up 15% from 1,307,656 children and youth during the 2015-2016 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2020). In a 2019 survey of more than 100,000 students at two-year institutions of higher education, rates of homelessness among learners ranged from 12% to 18% in the previous year (Baker-Smith et al., 2020). Today, it is more important than ever for State Coordinators for Homeless Education<sup>1</sup> (State Coordinators) and state CTE leaders to collaborate to ensure access to high-quality CTE for learners experiencing homelessness.

## The Value of Education in Preventing and Ending Homelessness

A longstanding research base establishes the value of what is known as “the education premium,” which essentially means that the more one learns, the more one earns (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In addition to having higher levels of income, individuals with higher levels of education are both more likely to move up the socioeconomic ladder and have access to employer-provided benefits (e.g., health insurance and retirement) and less likely to be unemployed or receive public assistance (Ma et al., 2019).

<sup>1</sup> Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, State educational agencies (SEAs) must designate a State Coordinator for Homeless Education to serve as the key homeless education contact within the SEA, and oversee the implementation of the Act in school districts throughout the state [42 U.S.C. § 11432(d)(3)].



Looking specifically at the relationship between educational attainment and homelessness, a recent study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago revealed that of the six subpopulations of youth identified as being at greater risk of experiencing homelessness, those lacking a high school credential had the highest risk. Young people without a high school diploma or graduate equivalency degree are 346% more likely than their peers who completed high school to experience homelessness. Other youth at a higher risk of homelessness include unmarried parenting youth, low-income youth, LGBT youth, and youth of color (Morton et al., 2017).

Further, a growing body of research associates CTE participation and completion with higher high school graduation rates, including for learners experiencing homelessness. Data from the state of Washington from the 2018-2019 school year found that learners experiencing homelessness who participated in three or more CTE courses had a four-year graduation rate of 78.9% and a four-year dropout rate of 10%, compared with a 61.3% graduation rate and 25% dropout rate for learners experiencing homelessness who participated in fewer than three CTE courses (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). Similarly, according to data from Montana from the 2016-2017 school year, learners experiencing homelessness who participated in three or more CTE courses had a four-year dropout rate of 4.6%, compared with 8.9% for learners experiencing homelessness who participated in fewer than three CTE courses (Montana Office of Public Instruction, n.d.).

### Barriers to CTE Access and Success for Learners Experiencing Homelessness

While high-quality CTE can help equip learners experiencing homelessness with the skills and credentials needed to obtain a high-wage, high-skill, in-demand career, many learners experiencing homelessness struggle to access and succeed in high-quality CTE programs of study. Common barriers to CTE access and success for learners experiencing homelessness include:

- ➔ unmet basic needs (food, shelter, etc.) that may interfere with a learner's ability to focus on learning;
- ➔ CTE admissions or entrance requirements that may be difficult to meet;
- ➔ out-of-pocket expenses that may create a financial hardship, such as fees to participate in career technical student organizations or sit for an industry-recognized credential;
- ➔ high levels of residential and school mobility that may affect program enrollment, such as when a learner experiencing homelessness transfers to a school in which the CTE enrollment deadline has passed;
- ➔ lack of early guidance about and engagement in CTE programs prior to academic decline or dropping out;
- ➔ scheduling challenges, such as when learners experiencing homelessness need income from an afterschool job that may conflict with the timing of CTE courses or unpaid work-based learning (WBL) opportunities;
- ➔ lack of access to reliable transportation to CTE programming or WBL;
- ➔ lack of access to technology that may be needed to participate in certain CTE courses of study;
- ➔ lack of cultural competency among instructors about the unique needs of these learners;
- ➔ lack of affordable childcare; and
- ➔ lack of access to needed wraparound supports, such as physical or mental health care.

## Strategies for Supporting CTE Access and Success for Learners Experiencing Homelessness

By acting and partnering intentionally, CTE and homeless education leaders can help address the unique educational barriers faced by learners experiencing homelessness, paving the way for CTE success and preparation for living-wage employment. Specifically, State Coordinators and State CTE Directors should consider partnering in the following ways to expand access to and success in CTE programs for learners experiencing homelessness.

### 1. Understand the requirements and expectations of federal laws enacted to support learners experiencing homelessness.

Perkins V and Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act both focus explicitly on promoting access to CTE for learners experiencing homelessness. Perkins V focuses on increasing CTE access and completion for special populations, which include learners experiencing homelessness [20 U.S.C. § 2302(48)]. Similarly, the McKinney-Vento Act requires states to remove barriers to CTE program access for elementary and secondary learners experiencing homelessness who meet relevant eligibility criteria [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(F)(iii)]. Homeless education and CTE leaders can collaborate to understand the requirements of their respective authorizing statutes and how statutory provisions can be leveraged to support learners experiencing homelessness in CTE programs.



For instance, Perkins V requires local CTE funding recipients, including school districts and colleges, to review student performance, program quality, and progress toward the implementation of CTE programs of study at least once every two years. As part of this review, recipients must consult a wide variety of stakeholders, including agencies representing homeless children and youth, when developing the local application that must be submitted to the eligible state agency to receive funds (20 U.S.C. § 2354). State Coordinators can provide insight into the stakeholders who should be consulted to ensure that the needs of learners experiencing homelessness are addressed in CTE program planning and implementation. State Coordinators also can identify districts or colleges serving significant numbers of learners experiencing homelessness so that state CTE leaders can ensure that these local institutions attend to learners' needs through their comprehensive local needs assessments and local applications.

### 2. Develop strategies to conduct intentional outreach to and engagement of learners experiencing homelessness.

Perkins V requires states to set aside a portion of state leadership funds to focus on the recruitment of special populations into CTE programs [20 U.S.C. § 2322(a)]. State and local CTE and homeless education leaders can collaborate in developing those strategies to ensure that learners experiencing homelessness are engaged effectively. Such strategies may include conducting outreach in locations that learners experiencing homelessness may frequent, such as schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, and sharing information on CTE supports for learners experiencing homelessness with local homeless education liaisons, school counselors, and youth-serving community partners.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, it is critical that learners experiencing homelessness have access to high-quality career advising that does not “track” learners into any particular program. Rather, learners experiencing homelessness should have access to high-quality career advising that makes them aware of CTE options and any related prerequisites early on in their education, starting as early as in the middle

<sup>2</sup> Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, local educational agencies (LEAs) must designate a local homeless education liaison to serve as the key homeless education contact within the LEA and oversee the implementation of the Act in schools throughout the LEA [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(ii)].

grades.<sup>3</sup> High-quality career advising should be a school- and community-wide effort, with effective coordination between school counselors and school administration and active participation from instructors and community organizations ([Advance CTE, 2018](#)).

### 3. Leverage data to identify and close equity gaps.



More research is needed to understand how CTE is serving secondary and postsecondary learners experiencing homelessness. Perkins V now requires states to publicly report how individuals experiencing homelessness are performing on required indicators (*see sidebar below*) [20 U.S.C. § 2323(b)(3)(C)]. State and district CTE and homeless education leaders can work together to collect data on CTE program enrollment, CTE program completion, and post-CTE program outcomes of learners experiencing homelessness. States can disaggregate the data by [Career Cluster](#)<sup>®</sup> or program to determine whether there is an under- or over-representation of learners experiencing homelessness in any given program area. State and local CTE and homeless education leaders can then collaborate to analyze performance data, identify equity gaps, assess why gaps may exist, and develop a plan to close the gaps.

## Perkins V Performance Indicators

Under Perkins V, states are required to report annually on the following [core indicators of performance](#) and disaggregate data for all special population categories, including learners experiencing homelessness.

### Secondary Performance Indicators

- High school graduation rates
- Academic proficiency rates for Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science
- CTE concentrator postsecondary placement and attainment
- CTE concentrator enrollment in nontraditional fields
- CTE concentrator participation in work-based learning
- [A state-selected measure of CTE program quality](#)

### Postsecondary Performance Indicators

- CTE concentrator postsecondary retention and placement
- CTE concentrator postsecondary credential attainment
- CTE concentrator enrollment in nontraditional fields

<sup>3</sup> Perkins V funding may be used to support programming as early as the fifth grade [20 U.S.C. § 2355(b)(1)].



#### 4. Provide professional development to relevant staff, instructors, and counselors.

Once state and local CTE and homeless education leaders have identified where equity gaps exist, they can provide professional development and technical assistance to relevant program staff, instructors, counselors, and other key partners to ensure that learners experiencing homelessness can access and succeed in CTE programs. Traditional professional development opportunities and preparation programs may not equip those responsible for implementing and delivering CTE with the cultural competency and knowledge to design programs and supports that will meet the unique needs of learners experiencing homelessness. Similarly, homeless education leaders may not be familiar with CTE program administration and courses of study. Professional development and technical assistance can be provided within and across CTE and homeless education programs, including partnering to provide joint training, to ensure that efforts are aligned appropriately.

#### 5. Collaborate across CTE and homeless education programs at the state and local levels to address common barriers for learners experiencing homelessness.



Finally, state and local CTE and homeless education leaders can collaborate both to identify common barriers that prevent learners experiencing homelessness from accessing and succeeding in high-quality CTE programs and to develop targeted solutions and interventions to remove such barriers. For instance, to address barriers related to CTE program entrance requirements, state and district CTE leaders can examine existing requirements to ensure that they are predictive of learner success and not just a means to address an excess demand for CTE programs. As an alternative to entrance requirements, state leaders can invest in and support programs, such as bridge or summer intensive programs, that will help each learner gain the foundational skills they need to succeed in CTE programs. They also may consider waiving certain entrance requirements for learners experiencing homelessness, when feasible.

### Supporting Postsecondary CTE Access and Success

While the McKinney-Vento federal law requires State educational agencies and local educational agencies to designate a State Coordinator and local liaison, respectively, their work focuses primarily on K-12 education. At the postsecondary level, the homeless education landscape varies by state or even institution. Some states, such as California, Louisiana, Maine, Nevada, and Tennessee, have enacted statutes that require institutions of higher education to appoint a homeless student liaison ([SchoolHouse Connection, 2020](#)).

Other states, including Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington, have enacted statutes that support higher education access and completion for students experiencing homelessness, including those attending technical colleges, by providing priority for enrollment or on-campus housing, financial or emergency monetary aid, or other forms of housing or other assistance ([SchoolHouse Connection, 2020](#)). Still other institutions of higher education have chosen to support students experiencing basic needs insecurity by providing case management, housing and other basic needs assistance, academic and career support, financial assistance, and mental health support, even if their states do not have any formal policies or programs in place ([National Center for Homeless Education, 2015](#)). To learn about the postsecondary homeless education landscape in a given area, state leaders can contact their [State Coordinator](#) or the [National Center for Homeless Education helpline](#).

Additionally, state and local CTE and homeless education leaders can work together to develop strategies that allow learners experiencing homelessness to enroll in CTE programs off-schedule or leverage strategies, such as deploying mobile labs, to ensure that highly mobile learners experiencing homelessness are able to access CTE. Furthermore, CTE leaders can leverage intermediaries—organizations that connect education systems and employers to support WBL or other career development activities for learners—to connect learners to paid WBL experiences. CTE and homeless education leaders also can work together to braid funds to cover out-of-pocket expenses that may create a financial hardship for learners experiencing homelessness. Depending on the specific need, possible sources of funding include local CTE program funds [20 U.S.C. § 2355(b)(5)(S)], McKinney-Vento subgrant funds [42 U.S.C. § 11433(d)], homeless set-aside funds under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education ([U.S. Department of Education, 2018, question M-4](#)), or other public or private funding, as appropriate.

### Key Steps for Growing a Partnership

To build more intentional CTE/homeless education partnerships, State Coordinators and state CTE leaders can start by implementing the action steps below:

**Reach out:** The first step in building a partnership is to connect with the appropriate CTE or homeless education counterpart. State leaders can reach out to their future partner to learn more about their work and share their interest in collaborating.

➔ [Contact your State Coordinator for Homeless Education.](#)

➔ [Contact your State CTE Director.](#)<sup>4</sup>

**Focus on concrete efforts with mutual benefit:** After sharing information about their work with their new partner, state leaders can discuss how they might add value to each other's work in a concrete way that benefits both CTE and homeless education programs, as well as the learners they serve. Benefits may include developing strategies to address specific barriers to CTE program access and success for learners experiencing homelessness, braiding funds to cover out-of-pocket expenses that may pose a barrier, reducing duplication of efforts, and ensuring statutory compliance.

**Start somewhere and build:** Early collaboration may focus on “low-hanging fruit,” or identifying goals that may be achieved with relatively limited effort, such as inviting each other to present at professional development conferences and establishing routine calls. Over time, as confidence in the partnership builds and the utility of joint efforts becomes clear, partners can take on more complex issues that require more effort but yield greater impact.

**Continue to invest:** As with any relationship, partnerships require continued investment over time. State leaders should establish ongoing communication with their CTE or homeless education partner to assess the effectiveness of joint efforts, consider additional needed action, and discuss emerging issues. This can be achieved through actions such as establishing standing check-ins or serving on each other's advisory boards.

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<sup>4</sup> State CTE Directors are responsible for the implementation of CTE and a state's Perkins V plan. State CTE Directors sit in the Perkins V eligible agency.

## State Spotlights

Perkins V's special populations provisions pave the way to more intentional cross-program partnerships in support of learners experiencing homelessness. As states plan how to support their special populations, they may consider the following examples of collaboration.

- ➔ **Driving Focus:** There are many ways that states can focus efforts intentionally on the needs of learners experiencing homelessness. In **Kentucky**, the Perkins V State Steering Committee included both state- and local-level homeless stakeholder representation. Kentucky also targets CTE program recruitment efforts to learners experiencing homelessness by distributing informational materials in places these learners may frequent. In response to needs identified during state plan development, **Arizona** hired a special populations/grant program specialist to serve as a state-wide resource for secondary/postsecondary CTE services for special populations.
- ➔ **Leveraging Data Insights:** The Perkins V requirement for states to collect and disaggregate data on indicators of performance for special populations paves the way for states to use data in new ways. **Montana** established a Data Review Board, which includes the State Coordinator, state foster care point of contact, students with disabilities staff, Title III, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (English Learner) staff, and the CTE Division of the Office of Public Instruction. This body will meet twice a year to review disaggregated data, share program updates, and plan needed technical assistance for local educational agencies.

### More Information

For more information on the education of students experiencing homelessness,

- ➔ Visit the [NCHE website](#),
- ➔ Visit NCHE's [Perkins V webpage](#), or
- ➔ Contact the NCHE [helpline](#) (call 1-800-308-2145 or email [homeless@serve.org](mailto:homeless@serve.org)) with questions.

For more information on CTE,

- ➔ Visit the [Advance CTE website](#),
- ➔ Visit Advance CTE's [Making Good on the Promise series webpage](#), or
- ➔ Visit Advance CTE's [Access and Equity Initiative webpage](#).



This resource is part of Advance CTE's [Making Good on the Promise](#) series, which confronts the negative aspects of CTE's legacy and defines the key challenges learners face today. The series provides promising solutions to help state leaders close equity gaps in CTE to ensure that each learner is able to attain the promise of CTE—a high-skill, high-wage, in-demand career. This resource was developed jointly by Advance CTE and the National Center for Homeless Education, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

[Advance CTE: State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work](#), first established in 1920, is the longest-standing national nonprofit that represents State CTE Directors and state leaders responsible for secondary, postsecondary and adult Career Technical Education (CTE) across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories.

The [National Center for Homeless Education \(NCHE\)](#), funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), serves as ED's technical assistance and information center for the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program.

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