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"WHATEVER WE NEED TO DO FOR THEM": A CASE STUDY OF MCKINNEY–VENTO SERVICE PROVIDERS AT FOUR OREGON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

BRIEF 3: STUDENTS NAVIGATING HOUSING INSTABILITY SERIES

Understanding the current available resources and supports provided to students navigating housing instability (SNHI)[1] is key to identifying gaps in services and barriers to accessing supports. SNHI Research Brief 1 and Brief 2 have both outlined the importance of supports for all students who may be at risk of housing instability and additional supports for those currently navigating housing instability. This brief utilizes surveys to McKinney-Vento liaisons and interviews with district and school staff to understand what supports they provide, how those supports are accessed, and what barriers continue to exist to support students.

Four school districts agreed to partner with ODE on this research project, allowing researchers to visit schools and districts to discuss the roles of support providers in the district, supports or practices they found successful, and challenges or barriers they faced in providing supports. A smaller student voice element is also included in the analysis.

Key Takeaways

- Districts provide considerable services to address immediate challenges, such as providing food and clothing access to students. Longer-term supports such as connecting students[2] and their families to housing support are more likely to be addressed by districts referring students to outside resources, such as local organizations and community partners,[3] or local government and state resources.

- Many districts rely heavily on individual staff members, especially the McKinney-Vento liaisons, to connect externally to resources and connect internally to students, families, and staff in schools. These two responsibilities often pull support providers[4] in opposite directions and force them to choose between time they can spend in schools with students or finding additional resources that can support students.

- Districts with less access to resources or community support often rely directly on staff members to help support students and families. With staff members already holding multiple roles and responsibilities, this expectation of support is likely to lead to provider burnout and potential risk of losing staff.

- Statewide, many of the barriers identified in providing and accessing supports can be attributed to systemic barriers and a lack of systemic supports. This is especially true for unaccompanied youth, who are more likely to be denied services and less likely to have access to shelters.

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1   The McKinney Vento Act defines Students Navigating Housing Instability as students who do not have access to a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence. This includes students whose nighttime residence is one of: shelter, unsheltered, hotel or motel, or doubled-up/shared housing.
2   Throughout this brief, students should be considered as a student attending an Oregon Public K-12 School.
3   Local organizations and community partners refer to non-government organizations and community groups or individuals that were explicitly named during interviews to provide supports to students and their families.
4   Support providers refer to individuals who work directly with students and families to provide a wide range of supports outside of classroom teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Executive Orders 23-02[5] and 23-03,[6] signed by Governor Kotek in the early days of her administration, directed state agencies to dedicate resources to researching and addressing high rates of housing instability across Oregon. Previous data briefs identified an overrepresentation of focal student populations and significant, persistent gaps in educational outcome metrics among Oregon students navigating housing instability. Housing instability discourse is both deeply personal and highly politicized, creating a great need for qualitative data that bridges the gap between lived experience and educational outcomes. Recently, the State of the State's Housing Report identified Oregon as the worst state in the nation for unsheltered houselessness among children, with an average of 19.9 children per 10,000 experiencing unsheltered houselessness.[7]

A key group of service providers are school district McKinney-Vento liaisons. The position title is derived from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the first ever significant federal legislative effort to tackle housing insecurity. The original version of the law was titled the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act and provided students with the right to attend school without barriers; subsequent amendments of the McKinney-Vento Act in 1990, 1994, 2001, 2002, and 2015 strengthened protections for children by expanding protections to include youth attending preschool

and Head Start programs run by school districts and added requirements to provide youth experiencing housing insecurity local resources including free school of origin transportation.[8] Under the law, each state must designate a statewide coordinator to oversee the program;[9] each public school district must also designate one or more liaisons whose responsibility is to ensure that students, including unaccompanied youth, and families experiencing housing instability are provided with the legal rights, information, resources, and supports necessary to meet the law's requirements. McKinney-Vento liaisons at Oregon school districts are an important source of information and direct assistance for students and families navigating housing instability.

This brief adopts a qualitative approach to understanding the lived experiences of housing instability among Oregon students and the providers who help them navigate these challenges. Two primary means of data collection inform this brief. First, ODE researchers sent McKinney-Vento liaisons at all Oregon school districts a survey. ODE researchers then utilized the survey results to inform their design of a series of interviews. Through fieldwork at several Oregon school districts in different parts of the state, ODE researchers spoke directly with school employees and community members who work closely with students and families navigating housing instability.

METHODOLOGY

ODE researchers collected data for this brief by engaging in two primary methodologies: an electronic survey, and semi-structured interviews. Secondary methodologies that informed this brief include observations made during site visits and content analysis of publicly available information posted on school district and Education Service District (ESD) websites.

Survey

ODE researchers created a brief, 14-question survey. Questions were mostly open-ended and optional to allow liaisons the opportunity to provide as much information as they would like. Demographic questions helped ODE researchers capture an understanding of where the respondents were located and how experienced they were in their role. Researchers sent the

survey to McKinney-Vento liaisons at all Oregon school districts in October 2023 and gave liaisons one month to respond. Each district has at least one liaison, but some districts employ up to five people in this role, adding up to 200+ across the state.

In total, 78 liaisons responded to the survey.

Respondents came from a range of locations and had a broad range of experience levels; however, almost one third of respondents had been in the role for one year or less.

5   Office of the Governor of the State of Oregon. Executive Order Number 23-02: Declaring a State of Emergency Due to Homelessness. https://www.oregon.gov/gov/eo/eo-23-02.pdf

6   Executive Order Number 23-03: Directing State Agencies to Prioritize Reducing Homelessness. https://www.oregon.gov/gov/eo/eo-23-03.pdf

7   Oregon Housing and Community Services. "State of the State's Housing Report" 2024 https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/about-us/Documents/state-of-the-states-housing.pdf

8   https://nche.ed.gov/legislation/mckinney-vento/

9   In Oregon, this coordinator is an employee of the Oregon Department of Education.

Table 1: Responses to ODE McKinney-Vento liaison survey by ESD.

ESD location	Number of responses
Clackamas	2
Columbia Gorge	2
Douglas	3
High Desert	3
Intermountain	8
Jefferson	1
Lake	1
Lane	12
Linn-Benton-Lincoln	4
Malheur	4
Multnomah	8
North Central	1
Northwest Regional	10
South Coast	6
Southern Oregon	6
Willamette	8

Figure 1: Responses to ODE McKinney-Vento liaison survey by length of time in position.

Two to Four Years 28.2%
Five or More Years 42.3%
One Year or Less 29.5%
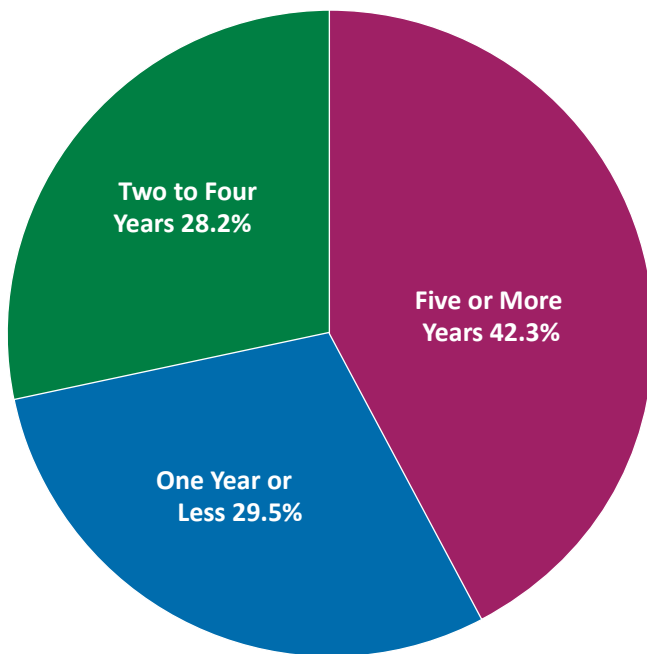
Liaisons provided a great deal of helpful information in their responses to open-ended questions that ODE researchers used to inform research design for the interview portion of this project. Some key themes that emerged from the written survey responses included:

- Heavy reliance by school districts on McKinney-Vento liaisons to provide both resources to students and families *and* support to other school staff;

- Significant challenges in (re)identifying students who are eligible for supports;

- Linguistic, cultural, and knowledge barriers that impede students and families from seeking the supports to which they are legally entitled;

- A lack of resources including funding, transportation, technology access, mental healthcare, and staff; and

- A lack of data-informed evaluation to assess the effectiveness of provided services

One important area of McKinney-Vento liaison work which this survey yielded important insights about was the (re)identification process for eligible students. Districts primarily rely on self-reporting via forms to (re) identify eligible students year to year. Some districts reach out to formerly identified students, but this is not universal. In many cases, districts have had to be creative with the ways they expand their identification efforts; identification of need for McKinney-Vento supports often occurs as a result of developing a closer relationship with a teacher or other staff member. The importance of relationship building to accessing supports is a theme we will return to throughout this brief.

Based on the feedback provided from this survey, ODE developed a plan for site visits to collect qualitative data. Some liaisons who completed the survey self-identified as willing to participate in this study; several of these districts were chosen for recruitment.

PARTNER DISTRICTS

ODE researchers selected potential partner districts from the survey respondents who named their interest in partnering with ODE. The research team reviewed district size, district demographics, including percentage of students navigating housing insecurity,[10] and NCES locales[11] with the intention to meet with districts who could help represent the diverse population and geography of Oregon. Time limitations allowed for only five districts to be included in the project from those who expressed interest in participating. All interviews were conducted in the spring of 2024.

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10   Spring Student Enrollment 2021-22 and 2022-23
11   2021 National Center for Education Statistics Local Boundaries https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries

Of the five districts selected, one district had to withdraw due to schedule limitations. The four districts who participated represented the I-5 corridor, southern Oregon, and eastern Oregon. This included one very small district, one small district, one medium district, and one large district, based on student enrollment.[10,12]

Across all four districts, ODE researchers interviewed a total of 28 district and school staff members, two additional support providers funded through ESDs or counties, and two students,[13] for a total of 32 interviews. After initially identifying McKinney-Vento liaisons and district and school administrators to interview, ODE asked district partners to identify other staff members who were instrumental in providing support for students navigating housing instability. This additional group included mental health professionals, student counselors, and office managers amongst others.

Student voice for this research was highly valued and the well-being of students was the top priority. To protect the relationships between support providers and students and families, invitations for student interviews were optional and not all districts chose to participate. Interview questions for students focused on support received from the school district without asking them to share details on their economic or housing situation.

Interviews

Interviews took place at school or district sites. Prior to site visits, ODE informed partner district informants of interview procedures, provided interview questions prior to the site visit for feedback, and informed on how the data collected would be maintained and analyzed.[14]

Interview questions catered to specific roles: administrators, McKinney-Vento liaisons, student supportive services, and students. To learn what resources were most available and most successful, ODE researchers asked questions regarding what supports were offered to students and families, staff collaboration and connection to outside community supports, the impact of related policies, and the effectiveness of the supports provided. In addition, questions addressed training and supports for staff, as well as the challenges and barriers in service provision.[15]

Coding

Once interviews were completed and transcribed, project team members generated a list of codes and definitions to answer the research questions based on knowledge from the interviews. Team members met multiple times during coding to align definitions and create additional codes. A complete list of codes and their definitions are found in Appendix C and were divided into the following categories.

- Barriers - Named the barriers students and families had accessing school, supports, and barriers to accessing stable housing.

- Supports - Categorized what supports existed to support students and families, both in accessing school and accessing stable housing

- Support Providers - Identified who was providing what supports, including schools and districts, city or county governments, direct supports from community members, and CBOs.

- Resource Attainment - How resources were identified or communicated by district or school staff.

- Impacts on Staff - What impacts providing support had on school or district staff members.

- Training - Levels of different training or experience staff members had with identifying or supporting McKinney Vento Students.

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12   "Very Small District" refers to districts between 1-499 ADMr as defined by 581-018-0330 OAR https://www.oregon.gov/ode/rules-and-policies/StateRules/Documents/22%20581-018-0327-to-581-018-0336-support-for-small-rural-districts.pdf

13   Students who were willing to participate had to have permission from a legal guardian or be over the age of 18, creating an additional barrier for this student group some of which are unaccompanied youth but not legally emancipated.

14   All interviews were audio recorded and participants gave verbal consent to be recorded before interviews began. Recordings were stored on a secure drive and deleted after transcriptions were checked for accuracy research team members

15   Students were asked different questions. A complete list of questions can be found in Appendix B

RESULTS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS[16]

Findings of the analysis are divided into the most frequently provided supports, most frequently named barriers and unmet needs amongst students, and the underlying challenges districts navigate in providing supports to students.

Supports

Every district offered some level of transportation support, clothing access, and food services; some of these supports extended to their families as well. This included food banks in schools and after-school backpack program with food supplies, school laundry services, vouchers that could be used in local charity shops, and free clothing closets accessible to all students which often included essential hygiene products.

> "[W]e have a room in our elementary [school] that was started by one of our teachers years ago. She would buy these clothes or ask for donations, and we had them in tubs and there was a certain day a week that she'd get out the clothes [for students]. Well, thankfully now we have a room that the kids can go."

TRANSPORTATION

The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to transport students navigating housing instability to their district of origin for school even if they live outside their original district. For many districts, supports often extend beyond that direct transportation to gas cards, transit passes, or directly helping transport students to other after-school activities or other service providers when necessary. Help often extended to families with assistance paying for gas or taxi services, allowing them to take younger children to preschool or day care, or commute to work.

> " [The] mother [was] looking for a job [...] she would be able to get out more if she had the childcare support...I was fortunate that I was able to move things around with our ARPA funds and provide a taxi for her to go drop her kid off and then a taxi to go pick him up again at the end of the day. So, she was willing to do it all year, last year, and we made it happen. The kid, oh my gosh, had the best experience participating in preschool."

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

Additional school supports included academic support such as tutoring, assisting students by accessing language and translation services, helping students access internet services at home, and campus health clinics available to all students. Occasionally schools

and districts provided hotel stays families during emergencies, more often districts referred families to community organizations for housing support. These types of immediate supports were the most named supports provided. Longer-term supports, such as helping students plan for their future career or continued education were also frequently mentioned.

SUPPORT PROVIDERS

While school districts were the most frequently mentioned support provider, communities and local organizations were important partners who could offer additional supports to students and families. Local government, referring to counties and cities, were named less frequently.

> "[The] laundromat here in town has two or three days a month that they do provide free laundry services through different programs. [O]bviously if [families] are having problems doing the student's clothing, they need family clothing as well. "

> "Food bags are done by like a group in the county, and they just deliver them. They actually deliver them to one of our teachers. She brings them over, and then I have an aid [...] that just puts them in the kids' lockers"

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16   Quotes included in this section have been edited for clarity, brevity, and to remove identifying information.

Barriers

School districts named a multitude of barriers they had to work to overcome while supporting students and families. These barriers are often interconnected and have been combined below to highlight the different types of work needed to ensure students and families access supports and services, as well as where there is a lack of supports.

TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

Interviewees frequently described the challenges posed by limited access to technology; students and families lacking a cellular connection were difficult to contact, meaning families couldn't answer calls or receive voicemails unless they were connected to a wireless service. This often resulted in the need to use public Wi-Fi. Providers named that some families could only communicate via email due to lack of phone, often slowing down communication considerably and limiting a family's ability to contact services. For some families, this meant missed opportunities for first come, first served resources.

> *"[F]or families that don't have emails or access to cell phones, or I mean a lot of our students and families just rely on like Internet based [calling]. So that like leaving messages and calling back is really hard. [There is] some systematic barriers there."*

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Interviewees at smaller or more rural school districts described frequent challenges associated with language or cultural barriers. While translation services were accessible to districts, interpreters were harder to access and required searching for providers outside of the local community. This was especially true for families needing support in languages other than Spanish and English, often relying on family members who spoke both languages. Even in more urban areas, finding support providers in the student's or family's language of origin could be difficult.

> *"[O]n the mental health side of things, it can be really hard to find bilingual providers or and bicultural providers and that can be a pretty big barrier for some families feeling uncomfortable to engage or like really being able to engage consistently because having an interpreter in the room and therapy is really not that effective."*
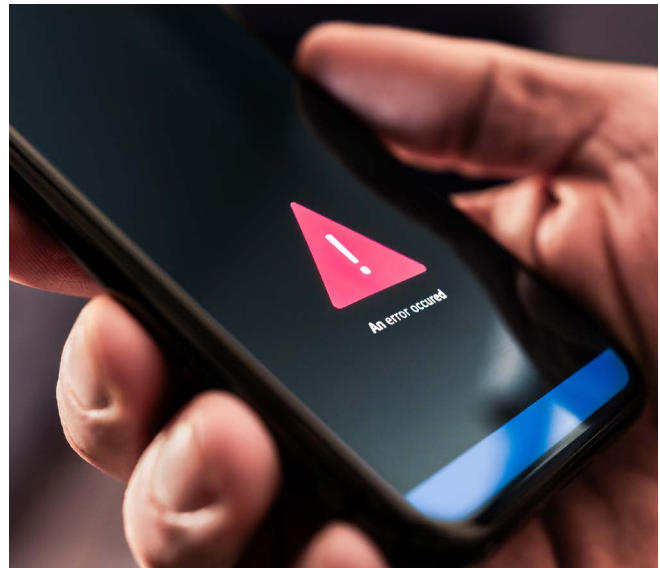
TRUST

Lack of trust was another prominent barrier district and school staff named during interviews. Students and families would be reluctant to accept services from the district, sometimes from worry that information told to the district would be shared to other government services. Staff members had to spend time building trust with students and their families. District and school staff also navigated students' concerns around identification or standing out to other students, and staff worked to find ways for students to access services without risk of identification.

> *"[S]tudents that have [had] really difficult past experiences with other systems [...] when we try to meet with them for the first time, they're super hesitant because they think we're like also from that system. So [...] we've had students that we really have to work on that trust just because they've had so much negative experience with [...] other agencies and even adults. It really takes a long time to fully develop that relationship [...] compounding the fact that they're not always in school, that makes it that much more difficult to build that rapport."*

TRANSPORTATION

The second most frequent barrier described by participants was providing transportation services, especially in rural areas. One district named needing to transport students for over an hour on the bus, as the student's family was often only able to find affordable housing outside their communities. Public transit was rarely seen as a reliable option in these areas due to infrequent service and long routes. Even school districts with more access to public transit named that transportation could be an issue. Not all families lived along transit lines and offering gas assistance required

that the family have a reliable vehicle. Families navigating housing instability are also more likely to frequently move, requiring bus routes to be remade, and often leading to students missing several days of schools in the process if no transportation alternative could be found.

HOUSING

After transportation, the lack of appropriate housing was the third most frequently named barrier in every district, regardless of size, area or locale. Districts were sometimes able to provide support for emergency housing, but more often direct housing support was provided by communities or local organizations. A lack of appropriate housing here defined as insufficient housing that was safe, affordable and large enough for entire families.

> " [N]avigating housing instability around here really comes down to [a] lack of housing period."

> "I really wanted to be in this community, but there wasn't anything in town that was for sale. And out of town you have to […] have some money because it's farm land or ranch land […] so I ended up commuting.

> "I do have a lot of families that are living in trailers. And I think they would be more than willing to move somewhere else. But there's just nowhere else to go"

> "This year, my biggest [barrier] is finding the housing or helping my families find their housing.

Even some staff members in rural areas named being unable to afford or find housing for themselves in the community they worked. What limited housing that existed was often not large enough for families or would not allow the families' pets to live with them. Applying for affordable housing meant families often experienced long wait periods and had to navigate convoluted systems to access limited affordable housing options. Navigating these systems can be a high barrier to overcome by families who may already lack access to technology and likely dealing with other systemic barriers associated with poverty.

SYSTEMS NAVIGATION

Support providers in districts and schools spent much of their time helping families and students navigating housing instability work through these systems of support.

This help with systems navigation[17] is especially important to unaccompanied youth needing to navigating public systems for the first time at a young age.

> "[A]partment complexes not accepting vouchers […] They should be accepting them, but the family doesn't really know how to navigate the system,

> and so they don't know about that…[families] are oftentimes being around in loops"

> "So, for our unaccompanied youth applying for benefits like SNAP has at times been difficult, especially because oftentimes you know these are unaccompanied youth, so they're staying with somebody that isn't their legal parent or guardian. But then they're still asking for somebody- for an adult- and we have to jump through hoops to get them that service. [W]e've had a couple of situations where they get [SNAP Benefits] initially, but then... They kind of backtrack and say, oh, you still need this [paperwork] and there's […] no adults available to sign for them, essentially. And so that's another situation that our students aren't getting the resources that they deserve."

Navigating these systems can be time consuming to overcome; in many of the interviews districts described a lack of providers or services in the area entirely. This was especially true of the more rural districts interviewed, where staff members named even a lack of grocery stores in town. Larger districts in more urban areas named that providers in their area would run out of resources or funding to support families throughout the year, or there were gaps in supports that left some students without access to resources such as shelters.

> "There's also a big gap when it comes to providing housing for what we call transition age students. So anywhere from like 16 to 24…Sometimes they're overlooked, especially because here in the area we only have one youth shelter and they have limited capacity. "

> "We don't have great shelter options here. [Ou]r primary women's shelter is a high barrier shelter. From what I understand, if you're LGBTQIA you have no chance of staying there. [T]he cutoff for children is 14 if you're male, so we can't keep families together. You can't keep moms and dads together. Moms and moms together, dads and dads…and you have to attend chapel every day or you lose your spot…[W]e have a men's shelter…same agency organization. We do have [a] low barrier shelter, but it is so full there's a wait list. So we just don't have enough shelter space for them […] There is no shelter [for unaccompanied youth] right now, in this exact moment, they do not have any place to go. "

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17   National Center for Homeless Education. "Leveraging Systems Navigators to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness," April 2023. Accessed October 29, 2024. https://nche.ed.gov/leveraging-systems-navigators-brief/

LACK OF PROVIDERS, FUNDING, AND RESOURCES

The combined lack of providers, funding, and resources were the most frequently coded barriers districts and schools faced in providing supports. In some areas the resources available lacked sufficient staffing to provide the level of support needed. This was especially true for mental health services; one district named wait times of up to six months for students accessing their community's mental health providers. Lack of funding was often named as a barrier by staff, with districts needing to use multiple sources to fund even one position or had positions who had to split their time across multiple roles due to funding restraints. Even when funding was available at the district level, staff positions often remained vacant for long periods due to a lack of qualified applicants.

> *"So we have significant mental health needs [in the area] with one of the lowest licensed mental health providers per capita in the state which is really challenging. I think medical is always an issue, or domestic violence, or substance abuse… And I think when you have all of those that are occurring within your home and then you have poverty or insecurity with jobs[…] all that stress and just the ability to even maintain yourself on a waiting list to get more stable housing is really taxing and you have to be a really strong person to wait that out."*

The McKinney-Vento liaison position is highly susceptible to these funding and staffing challenges. Of the districts interviewed, only two had dedicated, full-time positions for the McKinney-Vento liaisons. In one district the McKinney-Vento liaison was the district Superintendent, a shared role that many superintendents in small districts across the state carry. In another district a mental health professional served as the liaison, balancing two different roles that often competed for their time during the workday. ODE researchers interviewed only one district who was able to fund multiple McKinney-Vento liaison roles, they shared that it was important that they be able to rely on each other for support even when the work was hard. The smaller districts ODE researchers interviewed were more likely to name experiencing burn out and stress from their extended responsibilities and work to support students and families navigating housing instability.

Stable funding for these positions and supports for students navigating housing instability was one of the needs most frequently named by districts during interviews. When supports and funding were insufficient to meet the needs of students and families these districts often relied on community members or staff for help. In some cases, schools and districts asked their staff for donations to help meet the needs of students and families navigating housing instability. One district named how exhausting these requests could become throughout the year.

> *"[Say] we have a family that's struggling to pay their power bills. So all of a sudden the hat goes around and we come up with 300 bucks willing to pay their power bill or 400 bucks for a new set of brakes or a new whatever, and to repair their car and pretty soon staff starts struggling a little bit"*

Community support was often not accessed through direct systems of providers and supporters, but through relationships district staff had built with individuals throughout their community.

Relationships, Communication, and Burnout

Relationships between district and school staff with local organizations and community support providers, the relationships between McKinney-Vento liaisons and staff members in each school, and the relationships that support providers have built with students and families are all instrumental to connecting resources to students and families navigating housing instability.

McKinney-Vento liaisons are the primary experts in districts for what qualifies a student under the McKinney-Vento Act definition. Most staff members who were not McKinney-Vento liaisons stated that they had some level of training on McKinney-Vento students and the definition, but were not always confident they could identify students for support. These relationships between liaisons and school staff members worked in multiple ways. School staff often spent more direct time with students, and they were able to reach out to the McKinney-Vento liaisons when they had concerns

regarding specific students or needed to find specific support for a student. This allowed McKinney-Vento liaisons to identify students for services and share their knowledge of resources. While all staff that ODE researchers interviewed knew the McKinney-Vento liaisons and when to contact them, this line of communication was not always clear or expedient. Both school staff members and McKinney-Vento liaisons expressed frustrations when breakdowns in communication occurred.

> *"I would appreciate some supports around immediate triage and response because I have had experiences in which there's been a crisis situation, and the student or the family is in front of us, and our McKinney Vento liaison is not available, right? Like sometimes the response time can be up to a week […] I feel like when we put a referral […] we don't always have feedback or follow up from them."*

> *"[McKinney Vento students] may lose documentation [on immunizations] during their moves… [O]ne of the bad things [is] that we usually don't get notified when a student that's McKinney Vento has been excluded, even though they shouldn't be. We don't get notified until well after they have been. Maybe they're at the seven-day absence mark and then we'll get like a notification from the school saying 'We excluded the student, but we haven't heard from them since. Do you know what's going on with them?' and that will be the first time that we hear that they hadn't been like up to date on their immunizations"*

Many interviewees named that the personal connections of McKinney-Vento liaisons and other support providers in the community allowed them to access resources that may not be publicly available or are able to navigate vague or complicated referral systems to more expediently access services. This communication with support providers is often time consuming and can be a challenge to access for newer members of the community, both of which can create their own burden on staff.

Sometimes the communication barriers could be navigated with resource networks, meetings in which support providers directly communicated with other McKinney-Vento liaisons or providers in their area or were able to bring resources into schools and districts to directly share with families. These systems of support did not exist in all districts, especially those smaller and more rural districts. Many of the ones that did were organized by districts themselves, an additional workload not always achievable for providers who held multiple roles and responsibilities.

Relationships and building trust with students and families was described as an important aspect of providing supports by staff interviewed. Communication was often a challenge in creating those relationships. Sufficient language support and access to technology for students and families were often barriers to this communication. In many ways relationships with staff or other students were conduit through which students were able to access services.

> *"So, I heard from [McKinney-Vento liaison] about [college and job recruiting resources]. And there's not really that many flyers up about it. They usually come to you and ask you if you want help. But I do think they should put it out more so that other kids can know.*

> *[Many students learn about resources from] Each other. I didn't even know we had this shoe locker room in the gym that has […] shoes that people can wear. I just learned yesterday that it's open for all students to use. I didn't know that because it's not posted."*

When there is a lack of accessible resources, districts often needed to overcome barriers by relying on their own staff or community connections. For districts in which the McKinney-Vento liaisons held other roles and workloads this was an additional barrier. Many felt that they had to choose between time spent in schools working directly with students in their primary role, serving students as the McKinney-Vento liaison, and time spent in meetings learning about other supports or access other providers. Some of the staff ODE researchers interviewed named that they had felt burnout, or they were worried other staff members might leave their positions from the stress, most often in districts whose McKinney Vento liaison held multiple roles.

> *"The staff that we have are willing to put in that extra time and effort and definitely probably suffer the most with burnout. And I'm not sure if it's really sustainable. [I]f those individuals leave the district, I'm not sure that you could find another individual that would be willing to pick up all of those pieces or have really the ability to be so diverse in their skill set, and have that kind of compassion based motivation […] And I think that that's one of the scariest things about small schools is when you have some individuals that cover so many programs like what happens if they go on medical leave? What happens if […] some tragedy happens to that individual person? How does everybody else pick that back up?"*

Districts with strong connections to community partners and local organizations, and who received robust support from local government, were able to relieve some of the direct burden to meet the needs a family navigating housing instability may have.

> "We did receive a few referrals directly from [Culturally Specific Local Organization], and so having a community partner for families to us, is also a big help…we've referred families out to [them]. A lot of times the [Local Houselessness Organization] assessment can be really difficult to navigate, especially for our families that don't speak English… so the fact that [Local NGO] is able to make that assessment is a big benefit to our families because at least that gets them, like with the foot in the door."

Not all communication with outside resources was easy; local organizations were also likely to suffer from a lack of providers and limited resources. Bringing those organizations into schools and districts was often another additional responsibility McKinney-Vento liaisons held.

> "[Communication to local providers and organizations] I feel like it's [...] a two-way street that's only traveled one direction. We're the one [...] reaching out and [...] I don't feel like they do a lot of outreach to the schools and to the families. We would be a great avenue for them to be able to reach through, to be able to have better partners"

When districts received additional support that allowed them to overcome those barriers and build relationships, they were able to build trust with students and families. This potentially increases the amount of support students can receive and may allow students to advocate for each other to access supports that all students may not be aware of. One district described a student who had left their home and later asked the McKinney Vento

liaison for support because another student advocated that McKinney-Vento liaison was a trusted resource who could help. Both of the students that ODE researchers interviewed named that they knew trusted adults at school who helped them continue to be successful.

> "I have teachers here that, like, really get involved. My freshman and sophomore year was really tough for me, like with home and stuff like that. So [Teacher] helped me through that"

> "I have pretty good relationships with most of my teachers. And there's times where I've been going through something and they completely understand and they're willing to set some things aside if it'll help me and my home life"

Representatives from all districts interviewed named the importance of trust-building with students and families, emphasizing that connecting with students and families on a personal level allowed them to better learn what supports students needed to be successful and come to school regularly.

The McKinney-Vento liaison position does not receive dedicated state funding, and many districts assign the liaison responsibilities to school counselors or superintendents when they cannot fund a dedicated liaison position. Only two of the districts interviewed had dedicated positions for McKinney-Vento liaisons. Districts also differed in how they organized their supports for students. These districts each have unique situations, challenges, and successes, they also share several common themes—most prominent among them is the need to overcome systemic barriers to housing, shelter access, transportation, and access to mental health care across the state. They also all must navigate the effects of poverty in their districts and help students succeed in school while facing difficult family situations and dynamics.

LIMITATIONS

While this study has yielded many useful insights, it is also important to acknowledge limitations. First, as a qualitative study, this brief is not equipped to address all elements of students experiencing housing instability's lived experiences; it is important to consider this brief along with briefs and 2 as part of a package that, together, can inform and address different aspects of housing insecurity among Oregon's students and families. Second, while ODE intentionally partnered with four districts in geographically and culturally distinct parts of the state, representation is necessarily incomplete and cannot fully capture the broad range of experiences students and families navigating housing insecurity may have. Third, ODE researchers' time at each district was limited, providing only a snapshot of a point in time. Fourth and finally, ODE met mostly with

McKinney-Vento liaisons and administrators, heavily relying on these groups to tell stories on behalf of others to whom ODE did not get to speak. While researchers did interview two students for this brief, most of the knowledge gained about student experiences is secondhand from the adults who are responsible for providing services and care to them. ODE considered the inclusion of shelter, warming center, and other community organizational staff related to housing support in interviews but ultimately limited the scope of this brief to the school systems.

Despite these limitations, this brief nonetheless outlines important discoveries about the nature of how McKinney-Vento liaisons support students and families that ODE can utilize to strengthen and improve services.

DISCUSSION AND AREAS OF ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Housing instability can occur at any time during the year, and so must identification of students and families and ongoing support; however, there are many challenges to identifying students in need of support and connecting them to resources. The lack of systematic supports at the local, state, and federal level for these students and families navigating housing instability is a barrier districts must work to overcome every day and are often a strain on district and school staff, as well as their resources. The end of American Rescue Plan – Homeless Children and Youth (ARP-HCY)[18] funding creates an additional gap of flexible funding which allowed districts to prioritize supports where they saw the greatest need in their district.

The districts interviewed worked hard to overcome the barriers found in their district. They named the importance of this work to support students and how even without access to additional resources they planned to find a way to continue to meet students' needs.

The barriers schools and districts are facing are often larger than the district. The effects of poverty, the need for more appropriate and affordable housing for families and individuals, access to low-barrier shelter services for diverse members of the community, appropriate language services, and additional mental health providers were discussed across the state.

While all of these barriers need additional systemic supports, more specific areas include:

- Further training, communication, and implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act to staff in all school and district buildings to ensure that students are not being prevented from accessing services.

- Using data to implement systems that connect McKinney-Vento liaisons with students and families *before* they are at risk of aging out of school, nearing the 10-day drop from enrollment, or exclusion from services protected by the McKinney-Vento Act.

- Reducing barriers to access services such as SNAP, especially for unaccompanied youth.

- Development of resource networks and partnerships to increase knowledge sharing around services and resources.

- Increased communication at all levels, including engaging with students and families, communication between district and school staff members, and between school districts and the state to provide essential supports.

- Create additional dedicated funding for McKinney-Vento liaison positions inside districts to allow liaisons to dedicate their time to supporting unaccompanied youth and students and families navigating housing instability.

- Strengthen outreach and education to accessing affordable housing and how to navigate the application processes.

- Expand access and funding to low-barrier affordable housing services, shelters, and community organizations supporting individuals and families navigating housing instability.

These systemic barriers across the state need to be addressed in systemic ways, and not be the sole responsibility of McKinney-Vento liaisons, school and district staff, and district administrators to problem solve.

CONCLUSION

In briefs 1 and 2 in this research series, we noted that housing instability occurs across the state and does not occur in isolation but in connection with economic and social stressors. Students will likely need multiple types of supports and interventions to succeed in school and in life. For schools and districts to continue to provide supports to students navigating housing instability they will need additional resources, funding, and staff. Districts also need system-wide supports across the state to reach all students and relieve the burden of smaller and more rural districts who may be the only support providers in their communities. The importance of systems of support is vital; trying to increase supports by relying solely on individual support providers outside of a system can risk burnout and potential staff turnover.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS/RESULTS

Table 2: McKinney-Vento Liaison Outreach Survey

McKinney-Vento Liaison Outreach Survey Questions
1. What is your name?
2. For which school district do you serve as the role of McKinney-Vento Liaison?
3. How long have you served as the McKinney-Vento Liaison for this school district?
4. What methods do you use to identify students as qualifying for McKinney Vento support?
5. Re-identification across years can be difficult. What strategies do you use to re-identify students from year to year?
6. What barriers have you found in identifying students for support? Examples of barriers might include but are not limited to language or culture, wraparound services, translation, mental/behavioral health, transportation, tutoring/mentoring, lack of trust etc.
7. If you have found remedies to barriers in identifying students, please share some examples.
8. If you have not yet found remedies to barriers in identifying students, what, if any, options or ideas have you explored?
9. Based on your experiences working with students and families, what have you learned to be the greatest needs among students and families experiencing housing instability?
10. What district services do you consider to be the most valuable for students and families navigating housing instability (whether funded by McKinney Vento dollars or not)?
11. How do you assess the effectiveness of the support your district provides to students and families experiencing housing instability?
12. We are planning to have a deeper conversation, including site visits and interviews, with a few school districts across the state to learn about the experiences of students experiencing housing instability, along with staff and community-based organizations, etc. that are working to support students experiencing housing instability. Are you interested in hosting? Responding "yes" is not a formal commitment but an openness to discuss further.
13. We are also hoping to interview students that are experiencing housing instability across the state. What considerations should we keep in mind when approaching the questions we ask?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a McKinney-Vento Liaison, the students and families you support, and the resources available to you?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for McKinney-Vento liaisons

WORK/TRAINING

1) As a MKV liaison, how do you spend the majority of your time?

   a) (Additional prompt if needed): Providing direct support to students? Supporting district staff? Completing forms/intake or additional work?

2) What training have you received so far that has been most helpful to understanding your role and providing support to students/families?

   a) Are there specific training or supports that you feel would help you and your district/school in their work supporting students and families navigating housing instability?

SUPPORTS

3) Can you describe some of the barriers to identifying students for McKinney Vento support (For example: language or culture, wraparound services translation, housing, mental/behavioral health, transportation and tutoring/ mentoring, lack of trust etc.)

   a) How has your school or district adapted in response to the barriers you have identified?

4) Can you share what needs that students and their families navigating housing instability face?

   a) Which of these needs has the school or district been able to address?

   b) Are there additional supports you would like to see to help address these needs? (not limited to supports the school or district can provide)

5) How are you or the district supporting careers, skill development, and long-term goals for students?

   a) What challenges do you face in supporting students navigating housing instability in their careers, skill development, and long-term goals?

6) Can you describe how you or the district assess the effectiveness of your supports for students and families?

   a) Can you share more about how you implement these assessments and how you define success?

CONNECTIONS

7) Have you connected with culturally-responsive/culturally-specific resources/services that support students navigating or surviving housing instability?

   a) What solutions does this coordination/collaboration provide?

8) Is there collaboration between the school district and community partners, (CBO's, non-profits, or civic organizations etc.)? If so, could you tell us a little about how the organization provides support to the school community?

   a) What solutions does this coordination/collaboration provide?

   b) Can you please walk us through a typical interaction that you have with people in the community that you support? How do you reach out/first get connected with them? How often do you meet with them? What prompts the end of the relationship (when they find stable housing)?

9) How does the district coordinate with other services or shelters (food pantry, transportation, before/after school or summer academic support)?

   a) What solutions does this coordination/collaboration provide?

OTHER

10) What state or local policies currently in place most support students and families navigating housing instability? What policies would you change or implement to better support students and families?

11) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your role and the students you serve?

Questions for District and School Administrators

SUPPORTS

1) What services does the district offer to support students navigating housing instability?

2) What types of barriers have you or the McKinney-Vento liaison experienced in providing support for students and their families?

3) What would you improve or change about the services, support, or resources that are offered?

4) How is the effectiveness of the support provided to students and families navigating housing instability assessed?

5) What have you identified as differentiated needs and strategies to support students navigating overlapping potential barriers; for example, students navigating housing instability and migration, foster care, disabilities, etc.

6) How do you navigate prioritizing resources for needs identified by the liaison with other needs of the district?

CONNECTIONS

7) Do you feel like there is supportive collaboration among the McKinney-Vento liaison and school staff that contributes to effective support for students and families navigating housing instability?

8) How does the district coordinate with other services or shelters?

9) If you are currently collaborating with community partners, (CBO's, non-profits, or civic organizations etc.), what support does the organization provide to the community? Are any of those supports specifically for students and families navigating housing instability?

   a) Can you please walk us through a typical interaction that you have with people in the community that you support? How do you reach out/first get connected with them? How often do you meet with them? What prompts the end of the relationship (when they find stable housing?)?

10) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your role and the students you serve?

Questions for Student Supportive Services

WORK/TRAINING

1) Have you participated in any training to support students navigating housing instability? If so, how often?

   a) Are there specific training or supports that you feel would help you and your district/school in their work supporting students and families navigating housing instability?

2) How often do you collaborate with the McKinney-Vento liaison in your school district?

   a) What does collaboration look like between the McKinney-Vento liaison and other school staff to provide effective support for students and families navigating housing instability?

SUPPORTS

3) What services do you offer to support students navigating housing instability?

4) What do you perceive to be the greatest needs among students experiencing housing instability?

   a) What are the greatest unmet needs?

5) Have you experienced barriers to providing support for students and their families that are navigating housing instability?

   a) (For example: language or cultural, wraparound services translation, housing, mental/behavioral health, transportation and tutoring/mentoring, lack of trust etc.)

6) How do you assess the effectiveness of the support provided to students and families navigating housing instability?

CONNECTIONS

7) Have you connected with culturally-responsive/culturally-specific resources/services that support students navigating or surviving housing instability?

   a) What solutions does this coordination/collaboration provide?

8) Is there collaboration between the school district and community partners, (CBO's, non-profits, or civic organizations etc.)? If so, could you tell us a little about how the organization provides support to the school community?

9) How does the district coordinate with other services or shelters (food pantry, transportation, before/after school or summer academic support)?

   a) What solutions does this coordination/collaboration provide?

10) Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your role and the students you serve?

Questions for Students

1) Do you feel the school cares about you, your health, and your home life? [Why or why not?]

   a) How do you know the school cares about your health and home life?

   b) How do they show with actions that your needs are important. Could you share an example?

2) What are some of the most challenging things about staying engaged with school and regularly attending school?

3) Do you feel like there are adults at your school you can ask for help when you need it, for example a teacher or counselor? It is not necessary to share names.

   a) When you have a challenging topic or subject you want to discuss, is there an adult in your school you are able to connect with?

4) Are the school's services or supports meeting your needs?

   a) Is there anything the school does not offer that you need?

5) What kinds of opportunities do you have to engage in school experiences that prepare you for a future job or career path? [career awareness, exploration, preparation, and training]

APPENDIX C: CODES

Table 3: Code Definitions and References

Code	Subcode	Description	References
Barriers		Barriers to accessing supports and resources that are not directly related to accessing housing	225
	COVID Policies Ending	ESSER funds ending, eviction moratorium, etc.	2
	High Barrier Shelter	Shelter inaccessible due to exclusionary policies (requiring religious participation or not available to certain genders) or age restrictions	1
	Identification	Student unable to access resources because they have not been identified as SNHI/MKV	12
	Lack of Communication	Lack of communication or limited communication between supports creates barriers to access. Including the feelings of isolation from lack of communication	22
	Lack of Providers	Lack of human capital/ people to provide support, including lack of FTE or burn out, people not institutions	33
	Lack of Resources	Entity providing supports have been exhausted or very limited resources existed, including institutions	29
	Lack of Funding	When insufficient funding is explicitly named to be the resource lacked	24
	Lack of Trust	Lack of trust or relationship between students and families, and providers preventing services from being provided	10
	Language Barriers	Resources not available in person's primary language or no staff available to translate or interpret	9
	LGBTQ2SIA+	Membership in LGBTQ2SIA+ community hinders access to some resources or being excluded	3
	Local Policy Barrier	Trailer parks restrictions, city ordinances on trailer parking, local polices affecting shelters or transportation	19
	Mental Health	Mental Health challenges or lack of mental health supports hinder access to supports or resources	7
	Shelter Access	Shelter access exists, but are full or have expended all resources	5
	Social Capital	Navigating social systems (Applying for SNAP, acquiring birth certificate) as a barrier to accessing supports	14
	Substance Use or Abuse	Substance use preventing or hindering access to supports or shelters	3
	Technology Access	Services/resources only accessible with consistent access to phone or internet services	8
	Transportation Barriers	Lack of timely public transit either due to availability or access, unable to afford gas for car	33
	Turned Down or refused Services	Recipient of resource turning down supports or resource because they don't want to be seen wanting or needing help, could also fear of being identified or othered	15
Data		data is used to track or support students and or families, including their progress	16
Effectiveness		Positive Effects of Supports or measures of effectiveness	18

Code	Subcode	Description	References
	Attendance	Student returns or stays in school, attendance increases	6
	Graduate	Student being served successfully graduates	2
	Not hungry	Students being served are not hungry	1
	Trust	Relationships built with student or family	9
Food Insecurity		Food insecurity is an unmet need of students	9
Housing Instability Barriers		Barriers that hinder a student or family from acquiring stable housing	58
	Challenging Family Dynamics	Student relationships with family member, unrelated household occupants make them leave housing, or domestic violence situations	14
	Criminal History	Typically, of the parent of legal guardian that would prevent them from being approved for housing or accessing other supports including shelters	1
	Criminalization of Homelessness	Criminalization of forms of houselessness prevent services from being accessed or hurt an individual's effort to find housing	0
	Lack of Appropriate Housing	Due to housing in area being unsafe, unaffordable or non-existent due to housing supply shortage	23
	Lack of Jobs	Local area has a lack of jobs or underemployment, including long commutes for work	3
	No Shelters	No shelters or transitional housing in area	3
	Poverty	Poverty preventing access to housing or leading to housing instability	14
Impacts on Staff		Unintended or negative impacts on teachers and staff who work to serve or support to SNHI	53
	Burnout	Toll of long-term stress or compassion fatigue from providing services	13
	Direct Support	Staff providing direct (out of pocket) support to provide services for SNHI	12
	Fulfillment	Staff explicitly named their work provides them personal satisfaction or fulfillment	3
	Responsibility Creep	Increased expectations or responsibilities around providing supports or services to SNHI outside of their original work	25
MKV Training		What type of training if any did the interviewee receive	29
	Formal MKV Training	Formal MKV training from someone outside the district (ESD, State, etc.)	16
	Informal Training	Training from someone else inside the district or learning from online sources	10
	Little or No Training	No training or training they received did not leave them confident	3

Code	Subcode	Description	References
Resources Attainment & Knowledge		Who and how was knowledge on resources collected and or distributed	56
	Personal Knowledge	Knowledge of resources due to being a long-term community member or professional expertise, held by an individual and developed through long-term relationships,	30
	Resource Document	Knowledge of resources held in a document that can be wildly accessed (i.e., public documents, not personal lists)	4
	Resource Network	Having access to a resource network that shares knowledge on resources, held by a group or structure	22
Support Provider		Who is providing supports	163
	Community Led	Food drives, Christmas gift drives, community business fixing cars at low/no cost/, seasonal or non-formal support	25
	Local Government	County or City level governmental supports or programs	9
	Organization Lead supports	Explicitly named a non-profit or community organization, formal institutions	40
	School Provided	School/district provides support, with school funds or grant monies	89
Supports		Supports or services for students or families	236
	Additional School Supports	Wrap around services such as after-school programs, tutoring (not including food, clothing, or future)	30
	Clothing Access	Clothing closets, clothing-based charities laundry services, or access to hygiene products	38
	Direct Housing Support	Hotel/Motel vouchers, affordable housing, rent support, eviction assistance, temporary housing	11
	Food Access	In school food pantries, food boxes or community food pantries	31
	Future Planning	Career or post-secondary educational planning and supports	21
	Group Specific	Supports provided to a specific cultural or focal group	7
	Relationship Building	Building relationships with students and families, and connections with external resources for further supports or ease of access	54
	Systems Navigation	Support to students or families in navigating resources, support systems, programs, ex. helping students apply for SNAP or acquire a birth certificate	19
	Translation or Interpretation	Translation or interpretation supports	6
	Transportation	Transportation support not directly tied to bringing a student to and from school	19