

STATE PLAN

Peer Review Criteria and Notes Form for the McKinney-Vento EHCY Program

State Name: Connecticut
Reviewer Name: Consolidated Peer Reviewers



U.S. Department of Education

Background

Peer reviewers will apply their professional judgment and experiences when responding to the questions in response to the criteria below. Consistent with section 1111(a)(4)(C) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, peer reviewers will conduct an objective review of State plans in their totality and out of respect for State and local judgments, with the goal of supporting State- and local-led innovation and providing objective feedback on the technical, educational, and overall quality of a State plan, including the validity and reliability of each element of the plan. Reviewer responses to the questions inform the written determination of the Secretary regarding the State plan.

Role of the Peer Reviewers

- Each peer reviewer will independently review a consolidated State plan in accordance to the criteria for Title VII, Subtitle B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program (EHCY). Each reviewer will record their responses to the questions, will note where changes may be necessary for an SEA to fully address statutory and regulatory requirements, and may also present suggestions for improving the plan or to highlight best practices. Each peer will create individual recommendations to guide the remote review. These are submitted to the Department but will not be shared with the State.
- A panel of peer reviewers will meet remotely to discuss each SEA's plan. The panel of peer reviewers will generate one set of peer review notes that reflects their collective review and evaluation of the SEA's State plan, but the panel is not required to reach consensus. The notes should reflect all reviewer perspectives on each item.

After the peer review is completed, each SEA will receive the final peer review notes that include the peer reviewers' responses to the questions and any recommendations to improve the SEA's State plan in the sections that the peers reviewed. The peer review notes serve two purposes: 1) they constitute the official record of the peer review panel's responses to questions regarding how an SEA's State plan addresses the statutory and regulatory requirements; and 2) they provide technical assistance to the SEA on how to improve its plan. The peer review notes also serve as recommendations to the Secretary to determine what, if any, additional information to request from the SEA. Taking into consideration the peer reviewers' recommendations, the Department will provide feedback to each SEA that outlines the areas the SEA must address, if any, prior to the Secretary's approving its State plan. If a plan cannot be approved, the Department will offer the State an opportunity to revise and resubmit its plan and have a hearing, consistent with ESEA section 8451.

Consistent with ESEA section 1111(a)(5), the Department will make publicly available all peer review guidance, training, and final peer panel notes. The names of peer reviewers will be made publicly available at the completion of the review of all State Plans, though the peer reviewers for any individual State will not be made available.

How to Use This Document

The reviewer criteria is intended to 1) support States as they develop their consolidated State plans, and 2) inform peer review teams as they evaluate each State plan. This document outlines required elements in order for an SEA to fully address the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. If an SEA has provided insufficient information for peer reviewers to determine whether any question is fully addressed, peer

reviewers should indicate that the SEA has not fully addressed that requirement and identify what additional information or clarification may be needed.

Instructions

Each peer reviewer should include individual review notes in the space provided below each State plan requirement. For each State plan requirement, a peer reviewer will provide:

- Peer Analysis: Describe the peer reviewer's justification for why an SEA did or did not meet the requirements;
- Strengths: Summarize strengths of the SEA's response to the State plan requirement;
- Limitations: Summarize the limitations of an SEA's response to the State plan requirement, including issues, lack of clarity, and possible technical assistance suggestions;
- Overall Determination: Determine if the SEA met the State plan requirement (indicated by Yes/No); and
 - If the peer reviewer indicates 'no' above, the peer must describe the specific information or clarification that a State must provide in order to meet the requirement.

The peer reviewer notes should address all of the required elements of each State plan requirement in this document, but do not need to address each element individually (*i.e.*, the peer notes should holistically look at I.5 the Strategies to Address Other Problems, incorporating each of the five identified items in this element but do not need to individually respond to each item).

SECTION I: EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH PROGRAM, MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT, TITLE VII, SUBTITLE B

I.1: Student Identification (722(g)(1)(B) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe the procedures it will use to identify homeless children and youth in the State and to assess their needs?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA outlined several procedures and specific activities and strategies for the identification of homeless children and youth and their needs.
<i>Strengths</i>	A particular strength noted by the peer review panel was the methods, activities, and systems in place to assist LEAs in identifying homeless children and youth in the State. The technical assistance, professional development opportunities, evaluation of local programs, and the communication through the website and by phone/face-to-face by the state coordinator were comprehensive. Additionally, they highlighted the SEA’s self-assessment and monitoring system for LEAs as a strength.
<i>Limitations</i>	<p>The peer review panel observed that the SEA did not provide any specific information on how LEAs would identify homeless students. One significant limitation was that the SEA did not include mention of trainings, technical assistance or collaborations for non-subgrant districts or LEAs regarding identification and needs assessments for homeless children and youth. The reviewers were unclear how the State would monitor or check for compliance in non-subgrant LEAs.</p> <p>The peer review panel recommended that the SEA needed to include the data collection process conducted annually by each LEA and submitted to the State to strengthen the plan. Further explanation of how the technical assistance was maintained and provided by the SEA to meet the needs of LEAs would strengthen the plan, as well.</p>
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (2 Reviewers) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (1 Reviewer)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	Additional clarity is needed on how the LEAs will identify homeless students.

I.2: Dispute Resolution (722(g)(1)(C) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

➤ **Does the SEA describe procedures for the prompt resolution of disputes regarding the educational placement of homeless children and youth?**

<i>Peer Response</i>	
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA’s description provided details on its procedures, however, the SEA did not align processes to reflect what happened at the local level. Also, the SEA did not address specifics regarding transportation, which was identified by Connecticut as one of the major reasons they had disputes.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the SEA collaborated with other agency staff members such as school counselors and social workers. The focus of the policy in the plan was for the local level to address disputes, and students were allowed to attend school of choice during a dispute. Additionally, the State had a statutory requirement related to handling disputes.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel saw that the SEA lacked a description of a formal dispute process and the expectation of a complaint being solved in the “shortest possible time” seemed unrealistic based on the information provided. The SEA described how disputes would be elevated to the Superior Court, which did not seem relevant to the peer review panel due to the possibility of added barriers. Additional limitations observed were the lack of information on who could file a dispute, as well as the insertion of two examples of common dispute cases, which could confuse readers as being the only reasons to file a dispute and not fully reflect what the law allowed.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	SEA will need to revise its plan and outline issues surrounding transportation needs for homeless students during the dispute process. The mention of Superior Court was flagged by the peer reviewers as a barrier for a clear timeline, which was not mentioned in the plan, and could deter parents or family members from initiating or moving forward with a dispute process.

I.3: Support for School Personnel (722(g)(1)(D) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe programs for school personnel (including the LEA liaisons for homeless children and youth, principals and other school leaders, attendance officers, teachers, enrollment personnel, and specialized instructional support personnel) to heighten the awareness of such school personnel of the specific needs of homeless children and youth, including such children and youth who are runaway and homeless youths?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA provided a general description of programs provided to school personnel. Also, the plan identified LEA homeless liaisons as the change agents rather than describe how the SEA would heighten the awareness of school personnel. The narrative did not include any information about runaway and homeless youth. However, one peer reviewer observed that this section of the plan met what is required in Section 722(g)(1)(J)(ii).
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the SEA identified the LEA homeless liaison as the primary agent to heighten awareness among school personnel. Listed as strength was what the liaisons and the state coordinator would offer for supporting school personnel to heighten their awareness of homelessness in addressing specific needs of children and youth.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel saw that the plan lacked sufficient information concerning the training and outreach strategies provided by the local LEA liaisons. Additionally, there was a limited amount of specific details and information about how training and outreach occurred, at what level, and how often for school personnel.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (1 Reviewer) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (2 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The SEA must describe how it will heighten school personnel awareness through programs about the specific needs of homeless children and youth, as well as include information on runaway and homeless youth.

I.4: Access to Services (722(g)(1)(F) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless children have access to public preschool programs, administered by the SEA or LEA, as provided to other children?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA provided insufficient information needed to describe procedures to ensure that homeless children have access to public preschool programs. One peer reviewer, in particular, observed that the description in the State Plan for collaborating at the State level with the Office of Early Childhood, Head Start, Interagency Coordinating Council and others, for accessing preschool programs was reasonable.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the SEA was involved in collaboration efforts with other State preschool organizations, as well as other agencies who worked in early childhood.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel observed the plan lacked details in its description as to how the state coordinator's involvement in collaborations could be translated to ensure equal access to children in preschool. One peer reviewer observed there were no specific information provided for how EHCY students had access to programs. The peer review panel recommended that the SEA provide more information on how EHCY preschool students would have access to programs. Also, the peer reviewers recommended that the SEA describe more clearly how the state coordinators collaboration correlated into equal access for children in preschool.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (1 Reviewer) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (2 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The plan should specifically discuss how homeless preschool students will have access to programs.

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless youth and youth separated from public schools are identified and accorded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including by identifying and removing barriers that prevent youth described in this clause from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school, in accordance with State, local, and school policies?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA listed several Public Acts that addressed the issue of providing services to support education opportunities of homeless youth, however, the SEA did not describe procedures to

	ensure the removal of barriers nor did it mention full or partial credit accrual for homeless youth.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the SEA’s Public Acts afforded homeless youth access to online learning, credit recovery, remedial, independent student, employment internships, and supplemental instruction.
<i>Limitations</i>	<p>The peer review panel was unclear how the SEA identified needs and then removed barriers to meet those needs, as well as how the SEA disseminated information to all LEAs in the State. The peer reviewers noted that even though the laws were mentioned, there was no explanation on how those laws removed barriers for homeless youth to receive full or partial credit for coursework satisfactorily completed.</p> <p>The peer review panel recommended clarifying how the laws identified in the plan would remove barriers, as well as how information would be disseminated across the State to LEAs.</p>
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The SEA must describe procedures for ensuring that homeless youth and youth separated from public schools are afforded equal access to appropriate secondary education and support services, including removing barriers that prevent them from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school.

- **Does the SEA describe procedures that ensure that homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including magnet school, summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, online learning, and charter school programs, if such programs are available at the State and local levels?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA did not adequately describe how it would ensure that homeless children and youth who meet the relevant eligibility criteria do not face barriers to accessing academic and extracurricular activities, including magnet school, summer school, career and technical education, advanced placement, online learning, and charter school programs.

	One peer reviewer, in particular, observed that the state plan provided appropriate procedures to ensure students who face barriers to accessing their academics were provided with extensive options that would fit their needs in achieving academic goals.
<i>Strengths</i>	<p>The peer review panel noted the strength of district’s assurances to be in compliance with the State. Also, the list of alternative educational opportunities offered to students, including online learning and credit recovery, were highlighted by the peer reviewers as strengths to the plan.</p> <p>Additionally, peer reviewers noted that extensive educational opportunities were offered to students in Connecticut, including online learning and credit recovery to name a few. The SEA had systems in place to address each of the elements in the stem statement, but did not tie them all together.</p>
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel saw that the SEA had limited details on how they would ensure homeless children and youth had access to and do not face barriers in accessing the activities and programs from the question. While it was implied, clearer language was needed to demonstrate that students do not face barriers to accessing “extracurricular activities.”
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (1 Reviewer) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (2 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The SEA must revise the plan to indicate which of the academic and extracurricular activities/programs in the question are accessible to homeless children and youth at the State and local levels. The SEA must describe the procedures to ensure the removal of barriers for homeless children and youth to access the available programs, including extracurricular activities.

I.5: Strategies to Address Other Problems (722(g)(1)(H) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA provide strategies to address other problems with respect to the education of homeless children and youth, including problems resulting from enrollment delays that are caused by—(i) requirements of immunization and other required health records; (ii) residency requirements; (iii) lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation; (iv) guardianship issues; or (v) uniform or dress code requirements?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the SEA provided a general, open-ended description that provided flexibility to

	the state coordinator in addressing any type of need. However, insufficient information was provided to determine if the SEA had provided strategies to address the problems caused by the five issues in the question on behalf of homeless children and youth.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the SEA’s strategies were open-ended to allow for broader issues to be addressed by the state coordinator while working with LEAs.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel observed that the plan had insufficient description and few details in addressing the problems faced by homeless children and youth.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (3 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The SEA must clarify the five issues in the requirement and/or describe more specific strategies to ensure that all of the topics listed above are addressed by at least one strategy that is mentioned in the description. If the SEA plans to work with LEA liaisons and other partners to reduce barriers and enrollment delays, more information is needed on specifically how the CSDE will work with the LEA liaisons and its partners on issues listed in the question.

The SEA’s plan addresses the following problems encountered by homeless children and youths that disrupt their education resulting from enrollment delays:

- immunization and other health record requirements
- residency requirements
- lack of birth certificates, school records, or other documentation
- guardianship issues
- uniform or dress code requirements

I.6: Policies to Remove Barriers (722(g)(1)(I) of the McKinney-Vento Act)

- **Does the SEA demonstrate that the SEA and LEAs in the State have developed, and shall review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification of homeless children and youth, and the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools in the State, including barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
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<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that throughout other portions of the plan, the SEA and LEAs had policies and systems in place for the identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth, but there was no mention or reference to barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences. Local policies were also reviewed by the SEA during the monitoring of an LEA and when technical assistance was provided.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted that the collaboration between liaisons and the SEA coordinator was a strength, and that there were policies and systems in place for the identification and enrollment of homeless children and youth in the plan. It appeared that the review of policies was on-going by the state coordinator.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel saw that the SEA had no specific policies to help remove barriers to enrollment and retention due to outstanding fees, fines, or absences.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (1 Reviewer) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (2 Reviewers)
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	The SEA must revise the plan to ensure the SEA as well as LEAs have policies in place that address removing barriers to the identification, enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools due to outstanding fees, fines or absences.

The SEA’s plan includes the following policies to demonstrate that the SEA and LEAs in the State have developed, and shall review and revise, policies to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth:

- identification of homeless children and youth
- enrollment of homeless children and youth
- retention of homeless children and youth
- outstanding fees or fines
- absences

I.7: Assistance from Counselors (722(g)(1)(K))

- **Does the SEA include how youths described in section 725(2) will receive assistance from counselors to advise such youths and prepare and improve the readiness of such youths for college?**

	<i>Peer Response</i>
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<i>Peer Analysis</i>	The peer review panel observed that the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CCSCP) was a well-focused initiative in serving at risk and homeless students in preparing for college.
<i>Strengths</i>	The peer review panel noted the CCSCP was a comprehensive and data driven approach to develop individual action plans to support students in preparing for college. The CCSCP addressed several goals and aligned with the local, state and national goals. Through the data points, the CCSCP could access student needs, identify priorities, and develop a plan of action to collaboratively address the identified needs for all students.
<i>Limitations</i>	The peer review panel observed that the CCSCP did not specifically address homeless students. The peer review panel suggested more information to clarify how the CCSCP varies from one LEA to another and to provide clarification if it had been adopted by every LEA in the State.
<i>Did the SEA meet all requirements?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (3 Reviewers) <input type="checkbox"/> No
<i>If no, describe the specific information or clarification that an SEA must provide to fully meet this requirement</i>	