HOMELESS INNOVATION PROGRAM

Safe Harbor for Students Experiencing Homelessness: Best Practices for Improving Identification, Collaboration, and Connection Within Small and Rural LEAs

Model Innovative Practice

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Wheatland Union High School District is a small rural district located at the southeast end of Yuba County in Northern California, with total district enrollment at 1,135 students for the 2022-2023 academic year. Yuba County is one of the most impoverished counties in California with limited local employment opportunities. We are fifteen highway miles from the county seat with no public transportation available, which presents a significant barrier for many families to access social services.

From the 2018-19 school year to 2021-22 school year, our number of students qualifying as homeless increased 750%, from 4 to 34 students. Rural homelessness often differs from urban homelessness in that families facing housing insecurity are forced to double up due to a complete lack of local shelters or motels. Because of this, families experiencing homelessness may go unaccounted for in rural communities. WUHSD has prioritized identifying youth experiencing homelessness within our community and linking them to support, which in turn helps improve student outcomes.

To address the physical isolation and lack of services available in our community, WUHSD has become an integral component of connecting our students and families to available resources and services from clothing and school meals to healthcare and mental health services. WUHSD has developed an extensive system of support for our students experiencing homelessness with the aim to increase school attendance rates, student achievement, meet students' social-emotional needs, and provide the necessary resources to support families in need. As a public statement of commitment to educating the whole child and proactively overcoming barriers, the district updated our branding to state, "Every child, every day, whatever it takes."

WUHSD has developed a wraparound school program called "Safe Harbor" to support at-risk students. This program's goals can be categorized into four major areas: removing barriers, meeting physical needs of students, supporting mental health, and addressing individual learning needs. Because of our small student population, we target a number of special populations through the Safe Harbor program, including students experiencing homelessness, foster youth, former foster youth, and migrant education students; however, the majority of students (65%) in the program qualify as homeless. Each of these students have faced significant stressors, and the program coordinates a variety of supports to aid student connection and achievement.

> " The Safe Harbor program has...**made me feel safe**.
> -WUHSD Safe Harbor Student "

SAFE HARBOR OVERVIEW

Terms like homeless, foster, migrant, and probation-involved youth risk violating students' privacy and may be associated with negative stereotypes that label our students. When we were developing our program, we felt it was important to offer our students a program with a name that offered anonymity, invoked a sense of pride, and represented safety. Our district's mascot is a pirate and the pirate theme is ever-present throughout our campus. The name Safe Harbor was first proposed because we wanted our students to have a wraparound program that promoted their safety, peace, and connection. The students all approved of the name and two of our alumni helped to create the program graphic shown below (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Safe Harbor Alumni Artwork

© 2023 WUHSD

One of the students who finalized the logo said, "I think of Safe Harbor like an anchor in calm waters…and a lighthouse because the program shows us the way." Other students described the program name as:

- "Safe Harbor means a place of safety to me."
- "A safe place where people help/understand me."
- "I think of a place of support and trust."
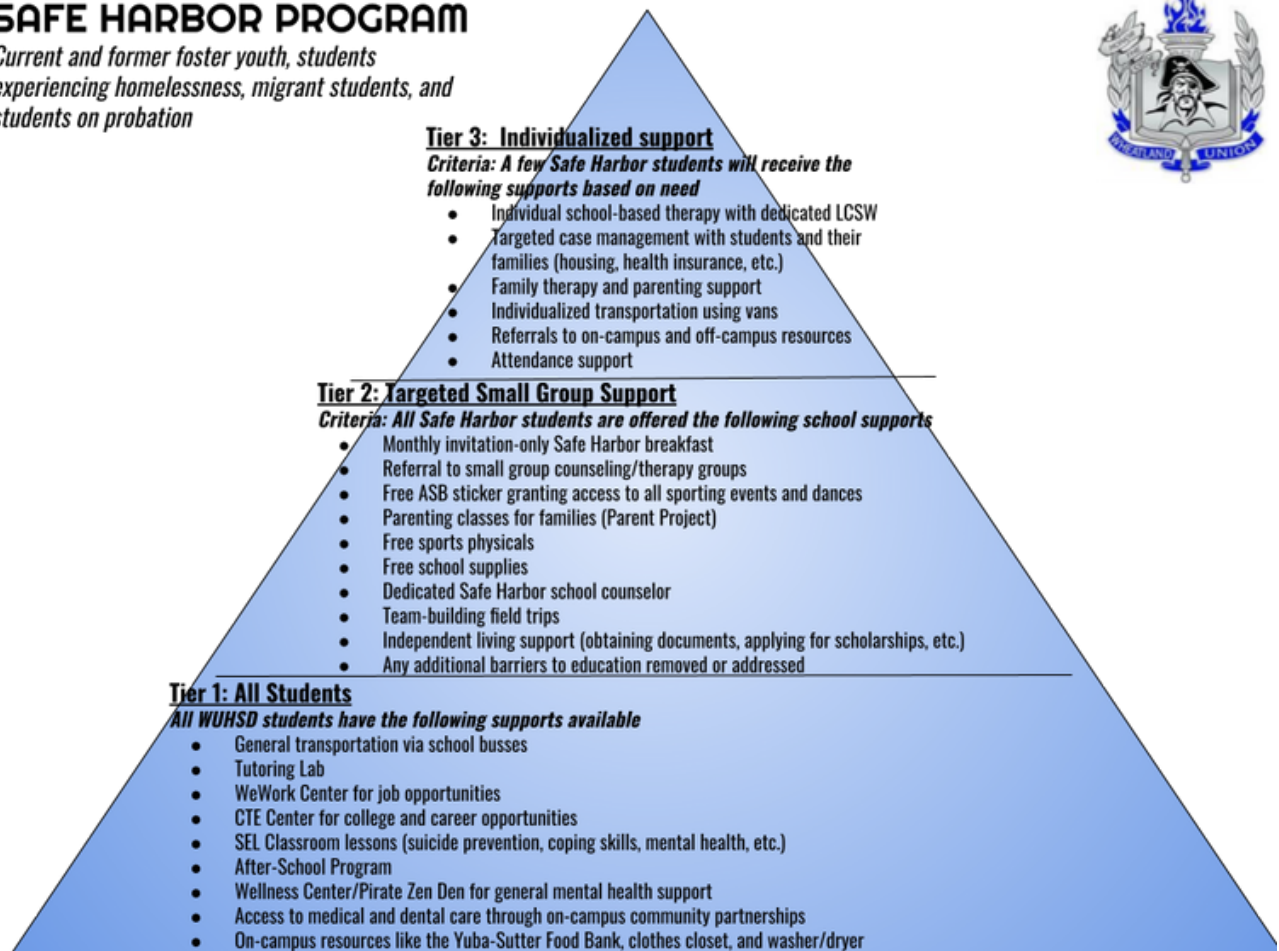- "A safe place to park at while I journey through life."

As a wraparound program, Safe Harbor interventions are integrated in WUHSD's existing MTSS structure to ensure that each student is offered the appropriate level of intervention based on data and need. See **Figure 2** for an overview of how WUHSD's Safe Harbor program includes interventions at all three tiers of service.

SAFE HARBOR PROGRAM

Current and former foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, migrant students, and students on probation

Tier 3: Individualized support
Criteria: A few Safe Harbor students will receive the following supports based on need
- Individual school-based therapy with dedicated LCSW
- Targeted case management with students and their families (housing, health insurance, etc.)
- Family therapy and parenting support
- Individualized transportation using vans
- Referrals to on-campus and off-campus resources
- Attendance support

Tier 2: Targeted Small Group Support
Criteria: All Safe Harbor students are offered the following school supports
- Monthly invitation-only Safe Harbor breakfast
- Referral to small group counseling/therapy groups
- Free ASB sticker granting access to all sporting events and dances
- Parenting classes for families (Parent Project)
- Free sports physicals
- Free school supplies
- Dedicated Safe Harbor school counselor
- Team-building field trips
- Independent living support (obtaining documents, applying for scholarships, etc.)
- Any additional barriers to education removed or addressed

Tier 1: All Students
All WUHSD students have the following supports available
- General transportation via school busses
- Tutoring Lab
- WeWork Center for job opportunities
- CTE Center for college and career opportunities
- SEL Classroom lessons (suicide prevention, coping skills, mental health, etc.)
- After-School Program
- Wellness Center/Pirate Zen Den for general mental health support
- Access to medical and dental care through on-campus community partnerships
- On-campus resources like the Yuba-Sutter Food Bank, clothes closet, and washer/dryer

© 2023 WUHSD

IDENTIFICATION OF YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

WUHSD's Safe Harbor program starts with early identification of youth with housing insecurity. A housing questionnaire is embedded in our digital registration process to identify homeless youth before they begin school (see **Appendix, Figure 7** for sample housing questionnaire). Going forward, we plan to customize our housing questionnaire based on the specific needs of our local population, but are currently waiting on an Aeries update to complete this. Our registrar reviews each new student's paperwork and flags any student whose residency may qualify them as homeless. Our registrar will then reach out to the adult who registered the student to gather additional information about their housing status. If it appears that a student may qualify as homeless, then they are referred to the district Homeless Liaison for further support. Families and students are able to complete registration without having to upload their immunization records.

Identification of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Our data team, including registrar, reviews the CalPads report of any newly-registered student to determine if they have been classified as homeless at a prior district. Regularly reviewing CalPads records can sometimes help identify students who may have been classified as homeless by a prior district, but whose guardians did not indicate lack of adequate or stable housing when registering in our district. This has been helpful in identifying some unaccompanied homeless youth and students who qualify as doubled up, whose guardians may not be aware that their housing situation meets the definition of homelessness.

At the start of each school year, all WUHSD parents and guardians are prompted to confirm existing data in our student information system (SIS), including residency status. The WUHSD data team, including Homeless Liaison, then runs a query of our SIS to identify students whose housing status may have changed over the past year and who may now meet the definition of homelessness. Often, families are not aware that doubling up due to economic hardship qualifies a student for homeless resource support and so may not reach out for assistance when housing status changes. Regularly reviewing data helps to link students and families up to the breadth of support available in our district.

Our district also receives support from the Yuba County Office of Education to ensure timely identification and registration of youth experiencing homelessness at the county level. Staff is embedded at Yuba County's Coordinated Entry Process in Marysville, so that families with housing security who go to the Coordinated Entry point for housing and social services can also receive support registering their students for school at WUHSD.

Students who qualify as homeless are marked with a "Safe Harbor Program" code in our SIS, so they can be easily tracked throughout the school year. This program code can be seen by all administrative, mental health, health services, and teaching staff, as we have found that it is especially helpful for our teaching staff to recognize that our Safe Harbor students may need extra support or accommodations in class in order to be successful. All staff members are provided training on the Safe Harbor program and maintaining confidentiality of student's housing or other protected information. Student's specific housing status (doubled up, unsheltered, living in a motel, etc.) is also documented in our SIS under demographics; however, due to the sensitive nature of the designation this specific information is only viewable by those who work directly with our housing insecure students. On a biannual basis, the WUHSD data team reviews our SIS, Calpads, and internal data to ensure that all students experiencing homelessness are accounted for and tracked correctly.

All students who may qualify as homeless or who are marked as homeless in our data systems are referred to our Homeless Liaison. Our Homeless Liaison will call home to parents or guardians to gather additional information about a student's housing situation and make a determination if they qualify for McKinney-Vento support. Directly connecting with parents and guardians is a pivotal element of the student support process, as often caregivers are not aware of the level of support available to homeless students at WUHSD and are often not aware of how to access community resources, including housing, social support, food, etc. The Homeless Liaison will also meet individually with each student who may qualify as homeless in order to gather information about residency, their needs, and to build school connection. In the event that a caregiver is not able to be contacted immediately, especially in the case of unaccompanied homeless youth, the residency information provided by the student may be enough to qualify a student as homeless. However, best practice is always to connect with the parent or guardian directly.

Finally, our school staff (teachers, counselors, office staff, support staff, administrators, etc.) receive training annually about the definition of homelessness and are asked to refer students who may qualify as homeless to the district Liaison. This training is critical to the identification of youth experiencing homelessness because often our teachers, mental health staff, and office staff are privy to sensitive information about student's home stressors, including possible loss of housing. Equipping all staff with the ability to identify housing insecurity early on can help link students and families to support more efficiently, rather than waiting for caregivers to request support or during annual data review.

BUILDING CONNECTION

WUHSD's Safe Harbor program offers regular opportunities to improve students' connection to staff, peers, and community resources. At the heart of this program is our monthly Safe Harbor breakfasts, which is a simple, cost-effective intervention that has immense payoff. Each month, Safe Harbor students are invited to an "invitation-only breakfast" during their first period where they are provided with a special hearty breakfast and an opportunity to socialize with peers who may be going through similar life stressors. This monthly breakfast helps build greater connection to school and also serves as a regular opportunity for support staff to connect with students and provide important information in person (such as information on how to access programs like sports, tutoring, etc.). Each breakfast consists of food, information, a survey, and a fun ice breaker activity. Funding for the breakfast comes from the Child Nutrition program and our cafeteria staff is happy to cook a special meal for our school's Safe Harbor students once per month.

At each breakfast, students are surveyed about their current needs, how the program can be personalized to them, and if they would like to be followed up individually by either their academic counselor or school therapist (See **Appendix, Figure 8** for an example of this student survey). While we initially relied only on a Google Form to collect survey responses, we found that not all students were motivated to complete the survey digitally. We had a much better response rate when we offered students the option to complete the survey either digitally or on paper, and then staff would input the results electronically for data analysis. If students miss the monthly breakfast, the information and survey is sent out to absent students on Google Classroom, which is updated regularly with information for our Safe Harbor students.

Students who attend the breakfasts have remarked how surprised they are to find out how many students are "just like them" and how it is a positive experience to realize they aren't alone in their challenges. Participation in the relationship building activities organized at each breakfast have helped foster new student friendships. For example, two of our Safe Harbor seniors were both not planning to go on their Disneyland senior trip because they did not have a friend going with them, despite receiving scholarships to attend. Both have experienced tremendous hardship and felt very isolated from their peers. Through the Safe Harbor breakfasts, they were able to make a connection with one another and, with some gentle nudging, teamed up to be each other's "person" on the trip. They now attend all the senior events together and have built a strong friendship that will likely last beyond their high school years.

Best practice:
Offer students the option to take surveys electronically or on paper. Offer an incentive, such as school swag or food, to ensure they complete it. Surprisingly, we found that many students preferred to complete the survey on paper. We then input their responses to the Google Form to track the results electronically month-over-month.

Safe Harbor builds connection: An 11th grade student with housing instability was hesitant to attend her first Safe Harbor breakfast. Her school attendance was inconsistent and her mental health was suffering. With some staff support, she finally made it to the breakfast and was shocked at how many students attended. Afterwards she remarked to the staff member, "I never knew how many kids at this school were just like me. [A student] was there and she's popular! I thought I was the only one, now I realize I'm not alone." This student met friends in the program and has since experienced an improvement in her attendance and mental health.

In addition to the monthly breakfasts, students in the Safe Harbor program also receive:

Personalized transportation - WUHSD has made transportation a cornerstone of our homeless student support program. Youth experiencing homelessness that are residing outside our school boundaries are offered transportation using a fleet of vans that pick-up students wherever they are currently residing, sometimes up to 40 minutes away from school. We have a dedicated driver who specifically supports our McKinney-Vento youth and is a friendly and supportive first and last point of contact for our students each day, allowing students to build a personalized connection with staff in a small setting as compared to traditional buses. Our driver will help identify our students' immediate needs and is in regular connection with WUHSD's Homeless Liaison to help get our kids connected to resources. For our Safe Harbor youth who struggle with chronic truancy and miss their morning van, we will do extensive outreach to pick them up whenever they contact us throughout the day to help reconnect them to school. Because we are a small district, we have cleared all our Safe Harbor staff members to drive students. We believe that if students want to be at school, then we must do whatever it takes to get them there, even if it means picking them up ourselves. We continue to provide transportation to our homeless youth for the duration of their time at WUHSD, which helps maintain them in their school of origin beyond what is legally required. We believe that investing heavily in transportation for our Safe Harbor youth is a key element in improving attendance and reducing barriers to education, and should especially be a priority for small, rural districts that lack access to public transportation.

Best practice:
Rural districts must prioritize transportation for all students, especially youth with housing insecurity. Clearing multiple staff members to drive students can help alleviate the burden on bus drivers. Teens also talk more in the car, so this is a great opportunity to build further connection.

Case example: A student transferred to us who was an unsheltered and unaccompanied youth and had a long history of chronic truancy. We began to provide a van to pick the student up where he resided. He developed a bond with his van driver and his attendance quickly improved. He now has a **97.4%** attendance rate and is preparing to graduate with his classmates, something he did not think possible when he started with us.

Free access to extracurricular activities - WUHSD ensures that youth experiencing homelessness have access to all extracurricular activities that may be cost-prohibitive, for example sports events, school dances, Sober Grad night, etc. All students in our Safe Harbor program are automatically provided an ASB sticker on their ID card, which waives the fees for all school-based events. This does pose a cost to the school and is an easy way to build connections with students. For events that are not covered by ASB, such as prom or the senior trip, we rely on a variety of funding sources to make sure our Safe Harbor students can participate. Funding sources include our Supplemental and Concentration Funds from Free and Reduced Lunch numbers, Title I funds, California Lottery, the American Rescue Plan, various grants, and community sponsorships/donations.

Birthday celebrations: All Safe Harbor students are recognized on their birthday with a card signed by all their teachers and support staff. Additionally, students receive a gift bag with snacks including their favorite candy and cake pastry. This is a simple way to acknowledge students for their milestones and further help them feel connected to school. This can be especially meaningful for our unaccompanied homeless youth, who do not always have people in their lives to celebrate them. Funding for this small contribution comes from ARP funds, Supplemental and Concentration Funds, and community sponsors.

Best practice:
Every dollar counts in a small district. Prioritize the completion of Free and Reduced Lunch program forms through parent communication, social media posts, and phone calls. Often, families do not realize they qualify for the program. This has helped generate additional funding for our district that we have been able to use for our Safe Harbor program and other programs.

A dedicated school counselor: Homeless educational rights and best practices are sometimes complicated, causing students to miss out on credits, important referrals, and academic success. Having a dedicated school counselor who is knowledgeable about the education of McKinney-Vento youth helps ensure a better outcome for our students. Our dedicated school counselor reviews transcripts and grades to track progress toward graduation, provide academic counseling guidance, and make referrals to available supports on campus (Tutoring Lab, CTE/C Center, WeWork Center, etc.). They provide support for students graduating under California's AB 1806 law and advocate for all students in the program. This position is funded through multiple grants to ensure longevity.

A dedicated Licensed Clinical Social Worker/therapist: WUHSD has made mental health a priority in the district and has four licensed therapists on staff to meet student needs. One of these therapists (a Licensed Clinical Social Worker or LCSW) has been dedicated to the Safe Harbor program and also doubles as the Homeless Liaison for the district. This LCSW is available to meet with all homeless students who need short or long term individual therapy and is integral to linking students and families to community resources. This LCSW partners with the dedicated Safe Harbor school counselor as the key point of contact for all students experiencing homelessness, ensuring that students' social-emotional needs are met, barriers to school are addressed, and students are connected to basic needs like food, healthcare, clothing, etc. The LCSW also provides parenting support and referrals to caregivers, coordinates with county agencies and providers, and refers students to small groups as needed. Like the school counselor, this role is also funded through multiple grants.

Support from Community Schools staff: Students in our Safe Harbor program have access to additional dedicated support staff through our Community Schools program. Community Schools staff assists in promoting self resiliency, developing their self advocacy, and emotional growth. Staff ensures that students access campus and community resources by assisting them in obtaining necessary documents needed for adulthood (birth certificates, social security cards, ID cards, etc.), obtaining health insurance, getting community resources like food and clothing, and getting linked to social services when they turn eighteen (food stamps, housing, etc.). Community Schools staff additionally help with transportation of Safe Harbor youth, helping to take them to appointments or assisting with school transportation when needed.

Parent and family support: When a student is found to qualify for Safe Harbor, parents or caregivers are contacted to discuss the program. A parent letter is sent out describing the program and support available (see **Appendix Figures 9 and 10** for a copy of this letter). Community Schools staff provide significant outreach to Safe Harbor families, making sure that parents, caregivers, and siblings all have access to the same community resources as their students (housing, food, benefits, etc.). Depending on need, families may receive intensive and targeted case management to help address a specific need. Family therapy is available at the school site and parents can also receive brief individual therapy through the LCSW. For parents who need more ongoing support, school staff helps to refer them to community behavioral health resources. Parenting classes are also available on site using the "Parent Project" curriculum and barriers to attendance are addressed to support parents' access to the resource.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS ON CAMPUS

As part of our district's community schools strategy, we have multiple grant-funded programs on campus that are available to all students. Students in the Safe Harbor program receive priority or targeted referrals to these programs to improve graduation outcomes and post-graduation success. These programs include:

- **After-School Program** which includes enrichment opportunities and transportation home.
- **Tutoring Lab** on site, focused specifically on math remediation. For the 2023-2024 school year, a second tutoring lab will be added that focuses specifically on reading help.
- **WeWork Center** helps students create resumes, obtain job skills, find employment, and coordinate work based learning opportunities.

Best practice:
Families in transition may not respond to or receive communication through traditional means. Offer multiple methods of communication to engage families, including email, social media, phone calls, and text messages. Utilize home visits and in-person meetings to build a personal connection with parents and caregivers. Text messaging using the Google Voice app has been especially effective for us to connect with parents. We have found that once our parents have a main point of contact at the school through text messaging, they are far more responsive and engaged. Trust and consistency is key for families in transition.

- **CTE/C Center** offers students expanded learning opportunities through dual enrollment/articulated classes for college credit, opportunity to explore career-specific pathways and obtain relevant certifications, and scholarship support.

> " The Safe Harbor program has...helped with a lot and **helped me to feel more confident in myself.**
> - WUHSD Safe Harbor Student "

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

School connection can be significantly impacted by a lack of access to resources, such as food, clothes, or toiletries. Rural schools may especially feel the burden of this, as students and families may have to travel significant distances in order to obtain resources. In order to address this potential barrier, WUHSD has implemented the following services as part of our community schools strategy and our on-campus Family Resource Center:

- **A Clothes Closet**, which contains basic items such as sweatshirts, shirts, joggers, and socks. This clothes closet includes both gently used donated items and new clothes. We host an annual new clothes drive to elicit donations from the community to help restock the clothes closet. Additional items are purchased using ARP-HCY funds. When McKinney-Vento qualified students have specific clothing items, such as shoes or jackets that we do not have in stock, we are able to request these items from our County Office of Education through their larger clothes closet.
- **A Food Pantry**, which contains both shelf-stable and frozen food that supplements our existing Nutrition Program. Students are able to grab snacks and additional meal items whenever they are hungry. This is stocked through a biannual FFA food drive on campus and also through our partnership with Yuba-Sutter Food Bank (as discussed later in this toolkit). The Food Bank is able to provide emergency food to families who need additional assistance whenever we reach out.
- **Toiletries**, especially items like toothbrushes, shampoo/conditioner, deodorant, and tampons and sanitary pads, are especially utilized by our Safe Harbor students. We stock up on these items annually using various funding sources (see the section later in this document for a discussion about possible funding streams).
- **Washer and Dryer** on campus so that students can have clean clothes available. This resource is also available to Safe Harbor families in need. We provide detergent to students and assist students in learning how to wash their own clothes. For those students who are hesitant to bring items to campus, we offer to pick them up and wash them for them to maintain their confidentiality.

EXPANDING COLLABORATION & COORDINATION

DATA TRACKING

WUHSD relies heavily on Aeries, our student information system (SIS), to track student needs and progress. This practice is especially important for our Safe Harbor program, as our homeless students have external stressors that often act as a barrier to academic achievement.

Students are coded in demographics if they qualify as a specific special population, such as doubled up, unsheltered, foster, etc. Coding students in this manner allows us to track student outcomes by specific population: foster, homeless, and migrant. We currently do not have a way to track students' status as former foster or probation in Aeries demographics, so these students are tracked manually if needed. See **Figure 3** for an example of how student's housing status is tracked in our SIS. The entry shown below shows a student who qualifies for McKinney-Vento services as unsheltered (circled in blue).

Figure 3: Screenshot of Aeries Demographics Page Indicating Student's McKinney-Vento Housing Status

Because all homeless students are identified in our SIS demographics page, we are able to easily run queries on student outcome data using the query shown in the screenshot below. (**Figure 4**). In order to track all McKinney-Vento qualifying youth in a query, we bucket the various homeless residency statuses into a single query (unsheltered, living in a motel, doubled up, etc.).

Figure 4: Query To Track McKinney-Vento Student Outcome Data

In addition, all students in our Safe Harbor program are given a Safe Harbor program code in our SIS that is visible to teaching staff. This allows all staff members to recognize if a student is in Safe Harbor and thus helps encourage teachers to provide the highest level of trauma-informed interventions to students who are recognized for experiencing a significant barrier to education. The term "**Safe Harbor**" provides a degree of anonymity because teachers do not know how students qualify for the program; they just know that a significant stressor exists.

Teachers are provided training throughout the school year about the Safe Harbor program to build awareness and are reminded to keep this information confidential. See **Appendix, Figure 11**, for an example of how this program code is presented to staff in Aeries.

Safe Harbor student outcome data is tracked each quarter to identify students who need more targeted referrals or support, and to track program efficacy. Using the Safe Harbor and demographics program codes, we run SIS queries to track grades and attendance at mid-semester grades at the end of each semester.

We also utilize an email system to identify student concerns and get them linked to support in a timely manner. When teachers or other staff members are concerned about a student, they are able to send a confidential email to the "Support Team" at WUHS. This email is received by site administrators, the Director of Student Services, our Special Education Director, and the Foster/Homeless Liaison. Any Safe Harbor student who is identified through the support team email is quickly connected to whatever services they need, such as academic help, mental health, physical resources, and more. Each of these emails are staffed at the weekly "Student Support Team" meeting, where challenges are problem solved and outcomes are tracked.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

WUHSD's community schools strategy has led to the development of multiple community partnerships to further meet student and family needs. This has transformed our school site as a hub for community resources, so students are able to access everything they need at the school site instead of traveling significant distances for services. Our rural location is especially challenging for our students with housing insecurity, as basic necessities are often not accessible due to significant drive times and lack of public transportation.

Best practice:
Look at the unique strengths and needs of your community. What services are needed? What local organizations can meet these needs? Cultivate formal and informal partnerships that help link students and families to necessary resources. Removing these barriers to education will significantly improve student outcomes.

Additional community collaboration that has been particularly helpful for our Safe Harbor students, especially those experiencing homelessness, include:

- **Yuba-Sutter Food Bank:** This year, we developed an MOU to host a monthly food bank distribution night at our school. The distribution is staffed by volunteers from Beale Air Force Base and students, including some Safe Harbor students whose families utilize our food bank night. Between 191-258 individuals are served each month through our food bank (52-71 families), which is significantly larger than when the food bank was located at a local church in the area. Our staff members are able to advertise the service and ensure our Safe Harbor families can access the distribution; if our families are unable to drive themselves to it, then we provide the option for an alternative pickup so they can still receive food. Our partnership with the food bank has also helped us to stock our food pantry and provide additional food to our Safe Harbor families during school breaks, when they don't have access to school meals. Link to food bank: https://feedingys.org

Figure 5: WUHSD and YS Food Bank's Monthly Distribution Flier

- **Harmony Health Clinic on Wheels:** We have a formal partnership with a local doctor's office to bring their mobile clinic to our site once per week. The mobile clinic accepts Medi-Cal and also offers a sliding fee scale to our uninsured students. Many of our Safe Harbor students are able to receive their medical care directly at our school site, without having to miss significant school to drive into town for healthcare. We are also able to offer free sports physicals to all Safe Harbor students through Harmony Health, which helps further reduce barriers to a complete educational experience. This has been especially helpful for our unaccompanied homeless youth, who may not have healthcare or may have difficulties accessing their insurance. Link to website: https://www.myharmonyhealth.org/clinic-on-wheels

- **Big Smiles Mobile Dental Clinic:** We have an MOU to have a mobile dental clinic on site to provide routine cleaning and preventative care. Like the partnership with Harmony Health, our dental MOU allows our Safe Harbor students to access dental care without missing significant school and is especially utilized by our unaccompanied homeless youth. Link to website: https://bigsmilesdental.org/
- **Yuba County Displaced Youth Multidisciplinary Team (DYMDT)** - We have an MOU in place to participate in a multidisciplinary team that focuses on problem solving the needs of youth and families experiencing homelessness in the community. Representatives on the MDT include Health & Human Services social workers, Homeless Liaisons from surrounding districts and our County Office of Education, behavioral health representatives, representatives from local shelters, and more. We are able to refer students and families to DYMDT as needed if we are unable to solve a challenge internally.

Additional partnerships include work-based learning opportunities, partnerships with the local Beale Air Force Base, Yuba County Probation, Wheatland Police Department, Yuba County Health and Human Services, Sutter-Yuba Behavioral Health, Yuba County Victim Witness, and more.

IDENTIFYING & SERVING THE NEEDS OF UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

Unaccompanied homeless youth are a growing segment of our McKinney-Vento population and pose unique challenges in terms of student support, legal rights, and barriers to independence. We have found that an increasing number of students are living doubled up without a legal guardian present in their lives. Many of these students are unable to access resources such as welfare benefits (CalWORKS, CalFresh, etc.), housing assistance, health insurance, and more. Students that are eligible to receive services are sometimes unable to do so because a legal guardian continues to claim them as a dependent, despite the student not living in their care.

WUHSD has made it a priority to identify all unaccompanied homeless youth and to serve them to the fullest legal extent possible. Unaccompanied homeless youth are able to enroll on their own and are immediately connected to the Safe Harbor program and Homeless Liaison for ongoing support.

Credits are reviewed and credit recovery options are granted, whether that is a study hall class period or more intensive credit recovery option through our continuation school, Edward P. Duplex. Students are reviewed to determine if they qualify for AB 1806 for reduced graduation credits.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are allowed to participate in all activities on campus, even if they do not have a legal guardian to sign off on their participation. We also provide transportation support to-and-from necessary off campus appointments, such as vision screenings, dental exams, and appointments at the DMV. The Homeless Liaison signs on behalf of the parent/guardian if a legal guardian cannot be reached for signature. Alternatively, a Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit can be used if a guardian is present but does not have legal rights (see **Appendix, Figure 12** for an example of this form).

Unaccompanied homeless youth also receive the following support:

- Assistance in obtaining necessary records, such as birth certificates or social security cards.
- Support in getting a legal ID through the DMV and Driver's Education classes for their license.
- Linkage to Yuba County Health & Human Services for targeted housing support.
- Assistance in obtaining Medi-Cal coverage through the minor consent option.
- On campus therapy and priority referral to on-campus medical and dental treatment.
- Life skills lessons.
- Targeted FAFSA support, including providing an Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination Letter to students upon graduation or if the student transfers out of district (see **Appendix, Figure 13** for an example of this).
- Food, clothing, and toiletries resources.
- Post-Secondary transition support by connecting the students to college-level McKinney-Vento liaisons.

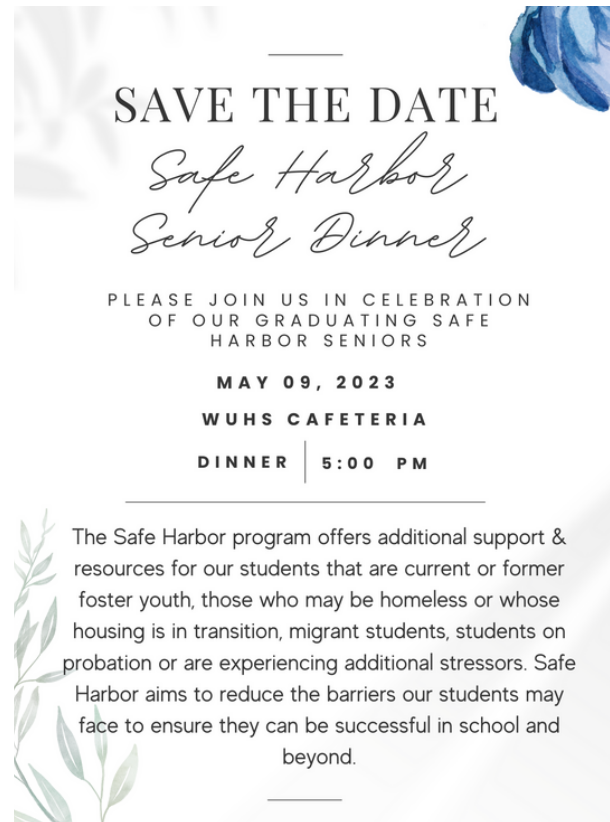## SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH SENIOR YEAR & BEYOND GRADUATION

Graduation is a momentous occasion for all students, but is an especially important accomplishment for students with housing insecurity and other significant life stressors. There are many activities for seniors that often require additional cost and may prevent full participation by students with income restrictions. As part of our program, we ensure that our Safe Harbor students are able to participate in all senior activities without incurring additional costs.

This may include free prom tickets, helping them obtain scholarships to Sober Grad Night, priority registration for college trips, helping them obtain prom dresses and suits through our Recycled Runway campaign, making them candy leis for graduation, and a free yearbook. Safe Harbor seniors are also invited to a Safe Harbor Senior Dinner to acknowledge them for their tremendous accomplishment. This Senior Dinner is attended by the students, their families or friends, staff members, and representatives from our Board of Education. The students were especially receptive to this special event, as many of them might not be acknowledged at traditional academic events for GPA or attendance.

Many of our students, especially our unaccompanied homeless youth, find security in the Safe Harbor program during high school. They have reported some anxiety about the transition after high school and the lack of connection to supportive adults. Likewise, some of our Safe Harbor families have also expressed worry about how to support their child's launch into adulthood. This year, we have created a Safe Harbor text group and plan to send out a quarterly check-in message to graduated students. They will have the option to "opt-out" of further communication. Parents are likewise encouraged to continue to reach out to the Safe Harbor community schools staff for support whenever needed, even after graduation.

Figure 6: Safe Harbor Senior Dinner Save the Date

SAVE THE DATE
Safe Harbor Senior Dinner

PLEASE JOIN US IN CELEBRATION OF OUR GRADUATING SAFE HARBOR SENIORS

MAY 09, 2023

WUHS CAFETERIA

DINNER | 5:00 PM

The Safe Harbor program offers additional support & resources for our students that are current or former foster youth, those who may be homeless or whose housing is in transition, migrant students, students on probation or are experiencing additional stressors. Safe Harbor aims to reduce the barriers our students may face to ensure they can be successful in school and beyond.

"The Safe Harbor program has…made me **feel belonging to this school.**"
- WUHSD Safe Harbor student

FUNDING FOR A MCKINNEY-VENTO PROGRAM

McKinney-Vento programs are not funded in the same way foster youth programs are, which limits some districts in building comprehensive student support programs. In order to address this gap, WUHSD relies on a variety of funding streams to support the Safe Harbor program. Funding sources include:

- **Title I funds** for gas cards and incidentals
- **Supplemental and Concentration Funds** through our Free and Reduced Lunch numbers. As previously mentioned, our district has prioritized the completion of Free and Reduced Lunch forms through social media campaigns, phone calls home, and home visits. This has led to a significant increase in funding from this source as our student population has grown and changed over the years.
- **California Lottery Funds**, which has helped fund various departments in our LEA.
- **Grants**: WUHSD has multiple staff members on campus who write grants that run concurrently and are braided into a comprehensive schoolwide approach. These grants help staff our programs and also help to pay for incidentals. The California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) and Homeless Innovative Practice grant have been especially helpful for staffing our McKinney-Vento program. We consistently seek out new sources of grant funding to ensure our programs can continue to operate long term. While grant reporting and requirements can add complexity to day-to-day operations, it is a necessary burden that results in rich return and program sustainability.
- **American Rescue Funds (HCY-I and HCY-II)**: Because we are a small district, we received a limited amount of money from ARP and are in a consortium with our County Office of Education. However, this money is still helpful in terms of being able to fund various aspects of our program.
- Transportation is funded through **Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Funds**; however, this is not well funded for rural districts as there has been no COLA increase in the past. While there is now a cost-of-living increase for transportation, additional costs are being absorbed due to new regulations around clean energy buses. This is a continued challenge for our district but is a necessary avenue to properly fund a comprehensive McKinney-Vento program.
- **Child Nutrition Program funds** are used to support our monthly student breakfasts, which are cooked by our kitchen staff.
- **Sponsors and community donations**: We regularly host campaigns to help gather supplies for our Family Resource Center, clothes closet, and food pantry, all of which are utilized by our Safe Harbor students. Our community has been hugely beneficial in ensuring this program is a success and are often happy to give back to the community in which they reside. While rural districts may not have the breadth of formal organizations available as compared to urban areas, the surrounding community in rural areas is invested in taking care of each other and so have been receptive in supporting our various student support programs.

APPENDIX

Figure 7: WUHSD Sample Housing Questionnaire in Aeries

Housing Status

Presently, are you and/or your family living in any of the following situations?

☐ **Temporary Shelter** Staying in a shelter (family shelter, domestic violence shelter, youth shelter) or Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer.

☐ **Hotels/Motels** Temporarily living in a motel or hotel due to loss of housing, economic hardship, natural disaster, or similar reason.

☐ **Shared Housing** Sharing housing with other(s) due to loss of housing, economic hardship, natural disaster, lack of adequate housing, or similar reason.

☑ **Unsheltered** Living in a car, park, campground, abandoned building, or other inadequate accommodations (i.e. lack of water, electricity, or heat).

☐ **Permanent Single-Home** Living in a single-home residence that is permanent.

☐ **Decline to Answer** You may select this option if none of the above home situations apply to this student or you do not wish to indicate your residency status.

APPENDIX

March Safe Harbor Exit Ticket

Please answer the following questions as best as you can. Select all that apply.

* Indicates required question

1. What is your first and last name? *

_____

2. What is going well for you right now? Select all that apply

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Grades
    ☐ Home life
    ☐ Friendships
    ☐ Romantic relationships
    ☐ Attendance
    ☐ Physical health
    ☐ Job
    ☐ Sports
    ☐ Extracurricular activities
    ☐ Mental health
    ☐ Other: _____

3. Which of the following is impacting you right now? Select all that apply.

    Check all that apply.

    ☐ Poor grades
    ☐ School stress
    ☐ Home stress
    ☐ Housing (having consistent housing or stability of housing)
    ☐ Emotions/mental health
    ☐ Relationship challenges (romantic relationships like boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.)
    ☐ Friendship challenges (fighting with friends, friend drama, lack of friends, etc.)
    ☐ Financial Stress
    ☐ Worry about post-graduation future (career, college, etc.)
    ☐ Physical health (being sick or injured)
    ☐ Attendance
    ☐ Clothing needs
    ☐ Food needs (access to food at home)
    ☐ Transportation (lack of transportation)
    ☐ Other: _____

Figure 8: Sample Monthly Safe Harbor Student Survey (continued)

4. Do you need to meet individually with Ms. Embry to discuss academic needs or concerns?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Yes

◯ Not at this time

5. Do you need to meet individually with Ms. Lund to discuss mental health needs or resources?

Mark only one oval.

6. Do you need anything else at this time?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What changes, if any, would you like to see to the Safe Harbor program? How can we make it better?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX

Figure 9: Safe Harbor Consent Form in English

Wheatland Union High School
1010 Wheatland Road, Wheatland, CA 95692
Phone: (530) 633-3100   Fax: (530) 633-3109
www.wheatlandhigh.org
Schandia Edwards, *Principal*
Brandon Moore, *Assistant Principal*
Lauren Link, *DSS & Assistant Principal*

Dear parent/guardian,

Wheatland Union High School is strongly committed to ensuring that our students have the resources and support to have a safe and healthy place to learn. Your student(s) is/are eligible to be a part of our Safe Harbor program. The Safe Harbor program offers additional support for those students who are current or former foster youth, those who may be homeless or whose housing may be in transition, migrant students, students on probation, or who are experiencing additional stressors.

Students in the program will receive added support and resources similar to other student groups, like our military connected students. We believe this will help improve student outcomes.

The Safe Harbor Program offers the following services:
- Monthly student engagement opportunities like student breakfasts/luncheons, workshops & activities.
- ASB sticker to get into school events for free
- Additional support with their academic school counselor
- Targeted referrals to on-campus and community support, including tutoring, school-based mental health, and local resources

If you have any questions please direct them to Aleia Lund, LCSW, the Director of Community Schools and Foster & Homeless Youth Liaison. The best forms of contact are by dialing 530-633-3100 ext. 225 or by email at alund@wheatlandhigh.org.

If you do not want your student to participate in this program please check the box, sign and date the form and return the form to the school no later than_____. Signing and returning this will release your student from participating in receiving these additional resources and support. **If you have no objections to your child participating in this program then you do not have to return any form and we thank you for your support.**

Student(s) Name: _____   Grade level: _____

I have read this form and understand the resources and support available through the program.

[   ] My child may not take part in the Safe Harbor Program.

Parent's signature:_____   Date:_____

Phone number: _____

Figure 10: Safe Harbor Consent Form in Spanish

Wheatland Union High School
1010 Wheatland Road, Wheatland, CA 95692
Phone: (530) 633-3100   Fax: (530) 633-3109
www.wheatlandhigh.org
Schandia Edwards, *Principal*
Brandon Moore, *Assistant Principal*
Lauren Link, *DSS & Assistant Principal*

Estimado padre(s),

Wheatland Union High School está firmemente comprometida a garantizar que nuestros estudiantes tengan los recursos y el apoyo necesario para tener un lugar seguro y saludable donde aprender. Su estudiante es elegible para formar parte de nuestro programa Safe Harbor. Los estudiantes que son elegibles para recibir apoyo adicional son estudiantes que actualmente o anteriormente son jóvenes de crianza temporal o aquellos que están sin hogar o cuya vivienda está en transición, estudiantes migrantes, estudiantes que están cumpliendo con su libertad condicional o jóvenes que están experimentando factores estresantes adicionales.

Los estudiantes en el programa recibirán apoyo y recursos adicionales similar a otros grupos de estudiantes como nuestros estudiantes conectados con el ejército. Creemos que esto ayudará a mejorar los resultados de los estudiantes.

Al formar parte del Programa Safe Harbor, los estudiantes recibirán:
- Oportunidades mensuales de participación estudiantil como desayunos/almuerzos estudiantiles, talleres y actividades.
- Calcomanía de ASB para entrar en los eventos escolares gratis.
- Asistencia adicional con su consejero/a académico.
- Referencias específicas al apoyo en la escuela y la comunidad incluyendo tutorías, la salud mental en la escuela y recursos locales.

Si tiene alguna pregunta, favor de dirigirla a Aleia Lund, LCSW, la Directora de Escuelas Comunitarias y el Enlace de Jóvenes sin Hogar y de Crianza. Las mejores formas de contacto son marcando al 530-633-3100 ext. 225 o por correo electrónico a alund@wheatlandhigh.org.

Si usted no desea que su estudiante participe en este programa por favor marque la casilla, firme y devuelva el formulario a la escuela a más tardar el_____. Firmar y regresar el formulario liberará a su estudiante de participar en el programa y recibir estos recursos y apoyo adicionales. **Si usted no tiene objeciones a que su hijo/a participe en este programa no tiene que devolver ningún formulario y le agradecemos su apoyo.**

Nombre del estudiante: _____ Nivel de grado: _____

He leído este formulario y entiendo los recursos y el apoyo disponibles a través del programa.

[   ] Mi hijo **no participará** en el programa Safe Harbor.

Firma del padre:_____ Fecha:_____

Número de teléfono: _____

APPENDIX

Figure 11: Screenshot of Safe Harbor Special Program Code in Aeries

APPENDIX

Figure 12: Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit

To keep other people from seeing what you entered on your form, please press the Clear This Form button at the end of the form when finished.

Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit

Use of this affidavit is authorized by Part 1.5 (commencing with Section 6550) of Division 11 of the California Family Code.

Instructions: Completion of items 1 - 4 and the signing of the affidavit is sufficient to authorize enrollment of a minor in school and authorize school-related medical care. Completion of items 5-8 is additionally required to authorize any other medical care. **Print clearly.**

The minor named below lives in my home and I am 18 years of age or older.
1. Name of minor: _____.

2. Minor's birth date: _____.

3. My name (adult giving authorization): _____.

4. My home address (street, apartment number, city, state, zip code):
_____
_____
_____

5. ☐ I am a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other qualified relative of the minor (see page 2 of this form for a definition of "qualified relative").

6. Check one or both (for example, if one parent was advised and the other cannot be located):
☐ I have advised the parent(s) or other person(s) having legal custody of the minor of my intent to authorize medical care, and have received no objection.

☐ I am unable to contact the parent(s) or other person(s) having legal custody of the minor at this time, to notify them of my intended authorization.

7. My date of birth: _____.

8. My California's driver's license or identification card number: _____.

Warning: Do not sign this form if any of the statements above are incorrect, or you will be committing a crime punishable by a fine, imprisonment, or both.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: _____   Signed: _____

California Courts Self-Help Center
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp/

For your protection and privacy, please press the Clear This Form button after you have printed the form.

Page 1 of 3
American LegalNet, Inc.
www.USCourtForms.com

Print This Form

Clear This Form

25

Figure 12: Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit (Continued)

Notices:

1. This declaration does not affect the rights of the minor's parents or legal guardian regarding the care, custody, and control of the minor, and does not mean that the caregiver has legal custody of the minor.

2. A person who relies on this affidavit has no obligation to make any further inquiry or investigation.

3. This affidavit is not valid for more than one year after the date on which it is executed.

Additional Information:

TO CAREGIVERS:

1. "Qualified relative," for purposes of item 5, means a spouse, parent, stepparent, brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister, half-brother, half-sister, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, first cousin, or any person denoted by the prefix "grand" or "great," or the spouse of any of the persons specified in this definition, even after the marriage has been terminated by death or dissolution.

2. The law may require you, if you are not a relative or a currently licensed foster parent, to obtain a foster home license in order to care for a minor. If you have any questions, please contact your local department of social services.

3. If the minor stops living with you, you are required to notify any school, health care provider, or health care service plan to which you have given this affidavit.

4. If you do not have the information requested in item 8 (California driver's license or I.D.), provide another form of identification such as your social security number or Medi-Cal number.

TO SCHOOL OFFICIALS:

1. Section 48204 of the Education Code provides that this affidavit constitutes a sufficient basis for a determination of residency of the minor, without the requirement of a guardianship or other custody order, unless the school district determines from actual facts that the minor is not living with the caregiver.

2. The school district may require additional reasonable evidence that the caregiver lives at the address provided in item 4.

APPENDIX

Wheatland Union High School District
1010 Wheatland Road, Wheatland, CA 95692   (530) 633-3100   (530) 633-3109 FAX

Nicole Newman
Superintendent
nnewman@wheatlandhigh.org

Independent Student Status of
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Determination for the 2022-2023
FAFSA

To Whom It May Concern:

I am providing this letter to convey my determination that after July 1, 2021, **John Doe** was

- an unaccompanied homeless youth, as defined by the College Cost Reduction and Access Act and the U.S. Department of Education's July 29, 2015, Dear Colleague Letter.
- an unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness.

Student's SSN: **XXX-XX-XXXX**
Student's DOB: **01/01/2000**
Student's Mailing Address: **1010 Wheatland Road, Wheatland CA 95692**

As per the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (Public Law 110-84), I am authorized to document this student's living situation and determine his/her independent student status as an unaccompanied homeless youth or unaccompanied, self-supporting youth at risk of homelessness. The financial aid office is not required to confirm this determination in the absence of conflicting information. It is not conflicting information if the financial aid administrator disagrees with my determination. Feel free to address any questions to me at the number or e-mail address listed below.

Signature	Date
Print Name: Aleia Lund	Phone: 530-633-3100 ext. 225
Email: alund@wheatlandhigh.org	
Title: Director of Community Schools	
Agency: Wheatland Union High School District	
Role: McKinney-Vento Liaison	

Tony Lopez
Board President
tlopez@wheatlandhigh.org

Shawndel Meder
Board Clerk
smeder@wheatlandhigh.org

Patricia Agles
Board Member
pagles@wheatlandhigh.org

Greg Forest
Board Member
gforest@wheatlandhigh.org

Ryan Belflower
Board Member
rbelflower@wheatlandhigh.org

Sincerely,

Aleia Lund, LCSW #87977
Director of Community Schools
Foster and Homeless Liaison
Wheatland Union High School District

APPENDIX

Figure 13: Sample FAFSA Verification Letter for WUHSD Unaccompanied Students (Continued)

From the 2021-22 Application and Verification Guide and
the July 29, 2015 U.S. Dept. of Education Dear Colleague Letter

Homeless
A student is considered homeless if he lacks fixed, regular, and adequate housing. This is broader than just living "on the street." It includes temporarily living with other people because he had nowhere else to go; living in substandard housing (if it doesn't meet local building codes or the utilities are turned off, it is generally not adequate); living in emergency or transitional shelters, for example, trailers provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after disasters; or living in motels, camping grounds, cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, or any public or private place not designed for humans to live in. It also includes living in the school dormitory if the student would otherwise be homeless. A student living in any of these situations and fleeing an abusive parent may be considered homeless even if the parent would provide support and a place to live.

Unaccompanied
When a student is not living in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Youth
Any student who is not yet 24 may qualify for a homeless youth determination.

Self-Supporting
When a student pays for his own living expenses, including a fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

At risk of being homeless
When a student's housing may cease to be fixed, regular, and adequate, for example, a student.
who is being evicted and has been unable to find fixed, regular, and adequate housing.

Recognized third parties
Relevant information can come from recognized third-parties such as private or publicly funded homeless shelters and service providers, financial aid administrators from another college, college access programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP, college or high school counselors, other mental health professionals, social workers, mentors, doctors, and clergy. Unlike McKinney-Vento liaisons and HUD or RHYA-funded shelters, these third parties do not have the statutory authority to make a determination of homelessness. However, they can provide "relevant information" to financial aid administrators who are making a determination of unaccompanied homeless youth status in the absence of a statutory determination.

CONTACT US

For additional information or questions, please contact:

Aleia Lund, LCSW #87977

Director of Community Schools

Wheatland Union High School District

alund@wheatlandhigh.org

530-633-3100