



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Arizona Homeless Education Program

The Educational Rights of Homeless Children and Youth

Office of Indian Education Connect

September 2026

Rita Rodriguez

State Homeless Education Program Coordinator



Purpose

- Rooted in both lived experience and professional practice, my purpose is to ensure children and youth experiencing homelessness can access the education, support, and opportunities they deserve by removing barriers and strengthening systems that promote student success.

Role & Responsibilities

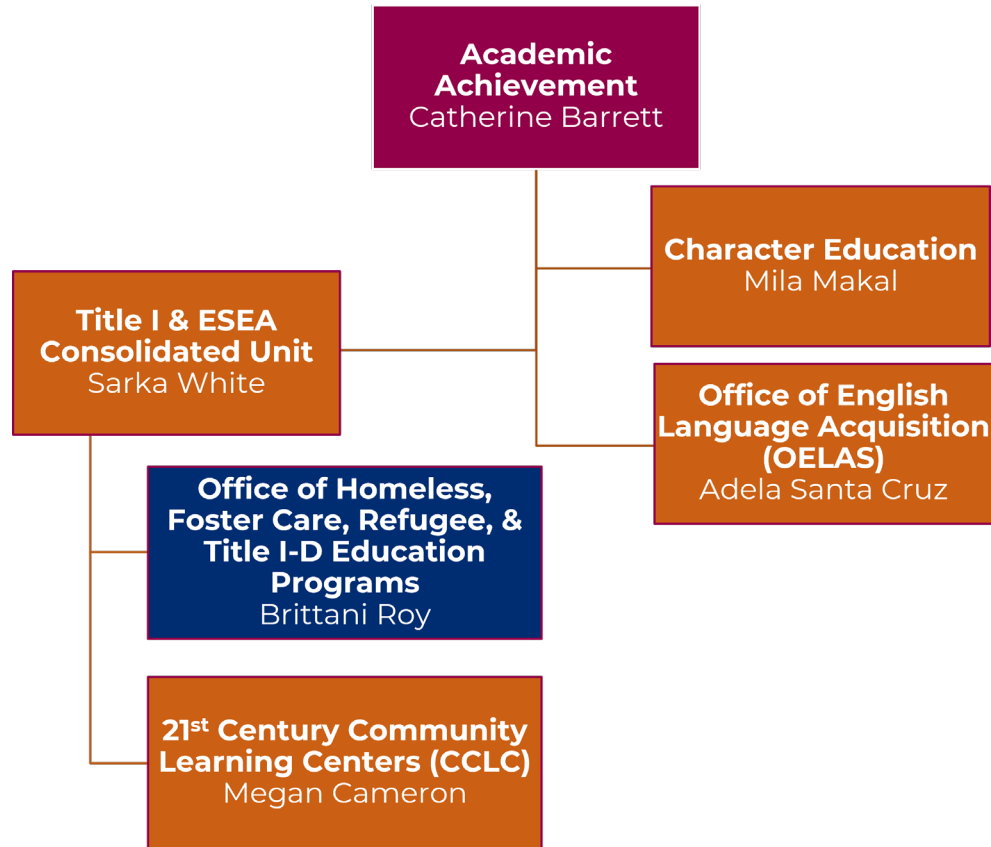
- Provide statewide leadership and support for Arizona's Homeless Education Program. Deliver training, technical assistance, and resources to help schools effectively serve students experiencing homelessness.
- Collaborate with education and community partners to strengthen implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act and improve student outcomes.

Experience

- Previously served as a McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison and Foster Care Point of Contact in Arizona's largest school district.
- Received national and state recognition for leadership in homeless education:
 - 2020 National McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison of the Year
 - 2019 Arizona Liaison of the Year
 - 2019 Community Partner of the Year



Office Structure & Mission Statements



Arizona Department of Education

The Arizona Department of Education is a service organization committed to raising academic outcomes and empowering parents.

Arizona Homeless Education Program

The mission of the Arizona Homeless Education Program is to ensure positive comparable academic outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness through implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance.





**Dr. Brittani (Didi)
Roy**
ESEA Director

Title I-D

**Homeless
Education
Program**



Rita Rodriguez
State Coordinator



Jan Brite
Grants Specialist

**Homeless, Foster
Care, and Refugee
Student Support**



Marisa Peña
*Refugee Student
Support
– Lead Program
Specialist*

**Foster Care
Education**





Internal Collaborations

THE ARIZONA HOMELESS EDUCATION PROGRAM (HEP)
&
THE OFFICE OF INDIAN EDUCATION (OIE)

Today's Session

- History of the McKinney-Vento Act
- Who is eligible under the McKinney-Vento Act?
- What are the rights of students experiencing homelessness? What services must LEAs provide them?
- How do LEAs implement the McKinney-Vento Act?
- How can we share this responsibility?

The Ten Legal Duties of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison



- Responsibilities of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison
- Statutory Citation, Stakeholders, & Requirements of each of the Ten Legal Duties

MADELINE HERNANDEZ



McKinney-Vento Liaison,
Tolleson Elementary School District

[Click here to view the video](#)

Grounded in Purpose

Deeply understanding all requirements within the McKinney-Vento Act is essential for developing and maintaining an LEA's Homeless Education Program.

Strong programs...

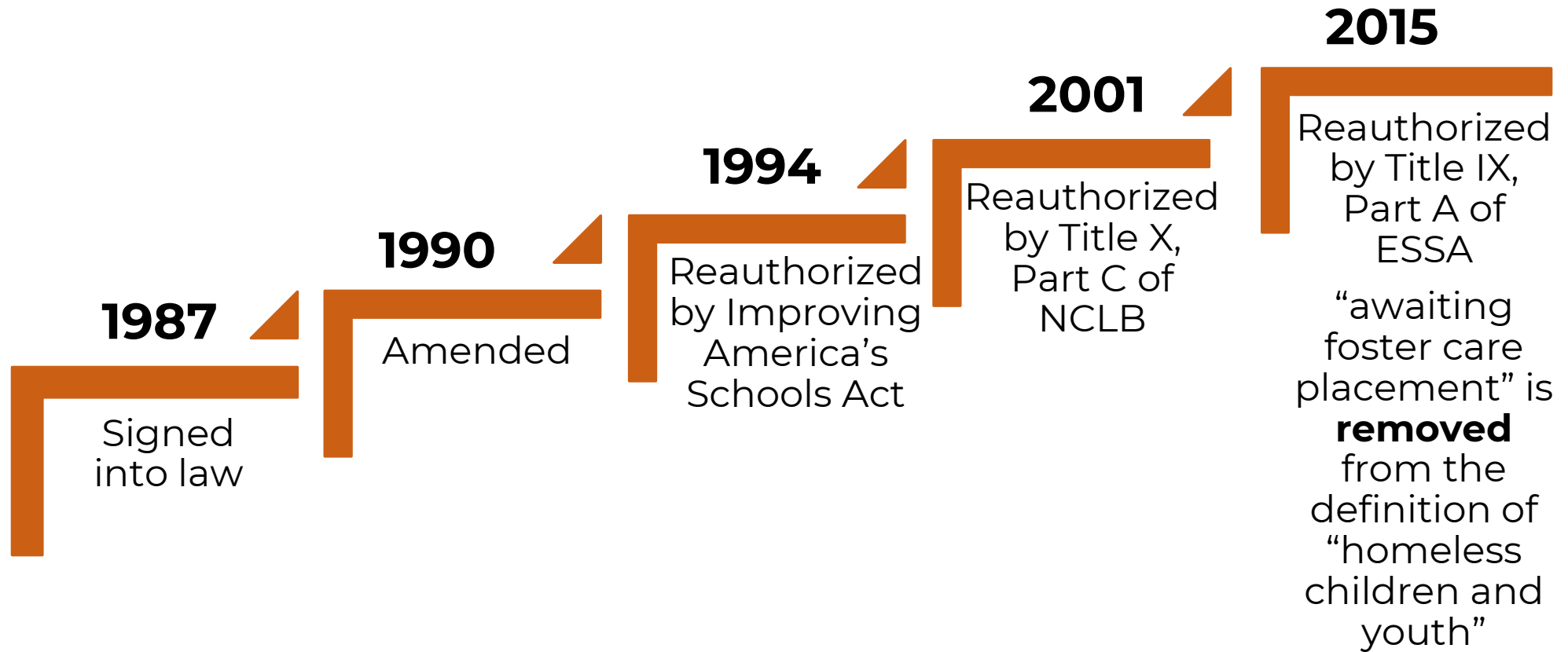
- Are **prepared** for ESEA and Arizona HEP programmatic monitoring
- Respond quickly and effectively to technical assistance related requests
- Gather **data** that is used to inform **improvements** to programming and supports for students, like opportunities for grant funding, and removing barriers
- **Ensure positive outcomes for students and families experiencing homelessness**

Who is eligible under the McKinney-Vento Act?



- History of the McKinney-Vento Act
- Legal Definition of Homeless
 - Common Qualifying Living Situations
 - Common Obstacles

McKinney-Vento Act History



Legal Definition of Homeless: McKinney-Vento Act

The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as those who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

(42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2))



FIXED

Stationary, permanent, not subject to change.



REGULAR

Used on a predictable, routine, consistent basis.



ADEQUATE

Lawfully and reasonably sufficient. Meeting the physical, psychological, fundamental and structural needs typically met in a home environment?

Common Qualifying Living Situations

Sheltered

- Shelters
- Transitional or other housing programs that meet the shelter criteria

Unsheltered

- Abandoned buildings
- Campgrounds, parks, vehicles
- Inadequate housing structures (no electricity, running water, code compliance issues)

Hotel / Motel

- Temporary housing in hotel or motel

Doubled-Up

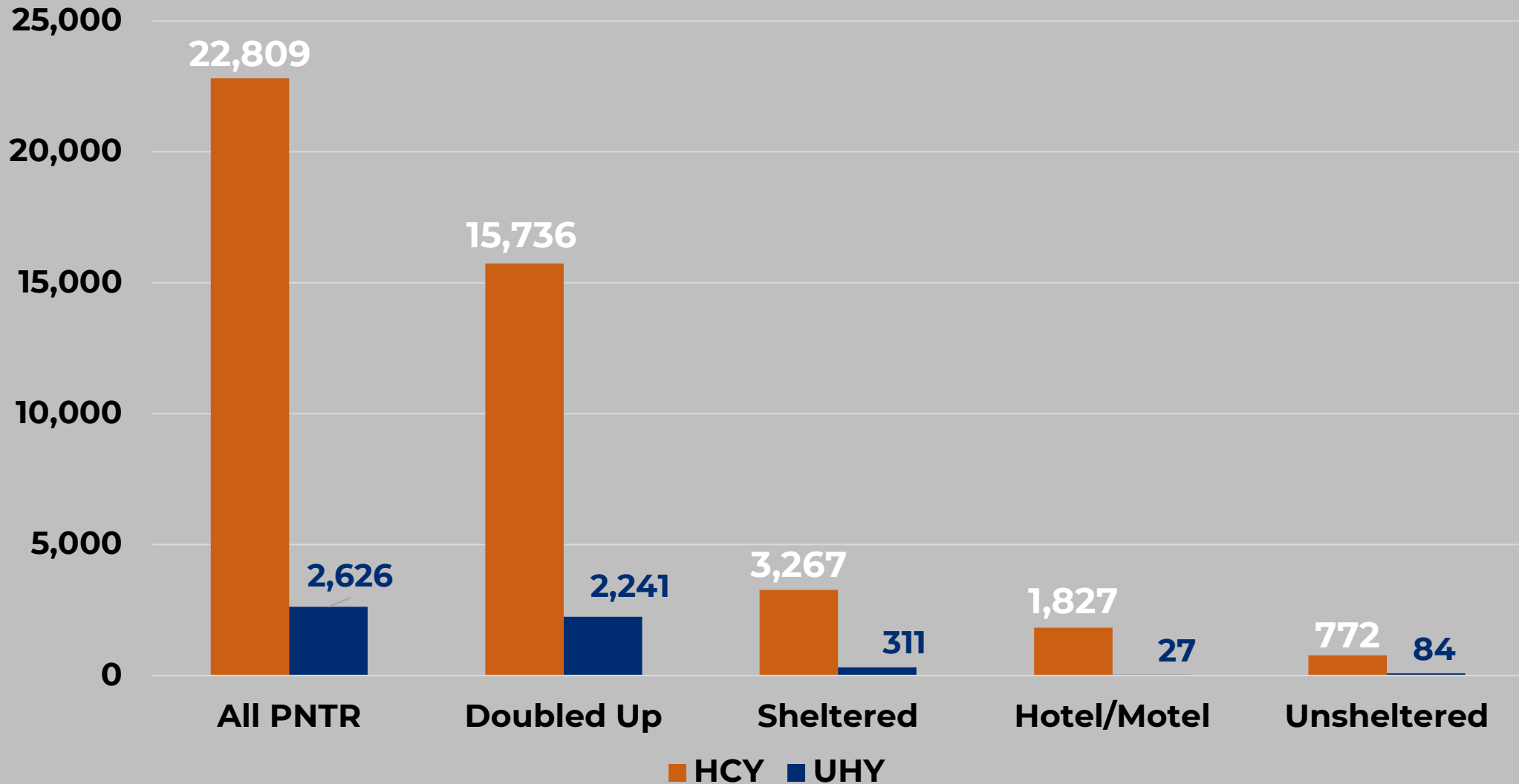
- Sharing housing with friends or family due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason.
- Typically not of mutual interest.

Unaccompanied

- A homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.
- This includes when a student is with a family member, but that person is not their legal guardian.

Migratory children may qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle if the child or youth is living in circumstances described.

2025-2026 SY HCY by Primary Nighttime Residence (PNTR)





Common Obstacles Faced by Homeless Children and Youth

- Unable to meet standard school enrollment requirements
- Move around and change schools often
- Experience hunger, tiredness, and stress
- Lack school supplies or completed homework (lack of space or resources)
- Lack access to reliable transportation
- Do not have a parent or guardian to help them (unaccompanied youth)

**What are the
rights of
students
experiencing
homelessness?**

**What services
must LEAs
provide them?**



- Key Provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act
 - McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison Responsibilities
- Rights of Homeless Children and Youth
 - Identification and Immediate Enrollment
 - School of Origin
 - Transportation
 - Dispute Resolution
 - Academic Opportunity

“LEAs shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has **equal access** to the same **free, appropriate public education**, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.”

42 U.S. Code §1431 (1)

McKinney-Vento Act



Key Provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act

- **Immediate enrollment,**
 - Even without documents typically required for school enrollment
 - **Unaccompanied youth** that meet the homeless definition, do not need their parent or legal guardian to enroll
- **Eliminate barriers**
 - Ensure school **policies** and **procedures** are fair
- **Dispute Resolution Process (Local and State Level)**
 - If the parent, guardian or youth do not agree with the eligibility determination or school placement decision they may **request to file an appeal**
- **School stability**
 - The school shall presume that it's in the best interest of the child or youth to remain enrolled in their **school of origin** for as long as they are experiencing homelessness
 - **Transportation** to school of origin
- **District Liaison assigned to every school district**
- **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**
 - Access to support from the Liaison and school counselors;
 - *Post-secondary planning,*
 - **Awareness of their *independent status* on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**
 - *Individualized support completing the FAFSA*

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Requirements



- **SEAs and LEAs must review and revise policies and procedures to ensure the removal of barriers for children & youth experiencing homelessness to ensure equal access to the same free, appropriate public education,** including a public preschool education, as provided to other children & youth
 - Identification
 - Immediate School Enrollment
 - Attendance
 - Academic Success
- **In Arizona, all McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons must attend a minimum of eight (8) professional learning hours each school year**
 - Arizona Homeless Education Program
 - National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE)
 - SchoolHouse Connection
- **In Arizona, all LEAs must include the Ed. Rights of HCY & Arizona SRQ in all methods and levels of enrollment, re-enrollment, and/or registration**

42 U.S.C. §§ 11431

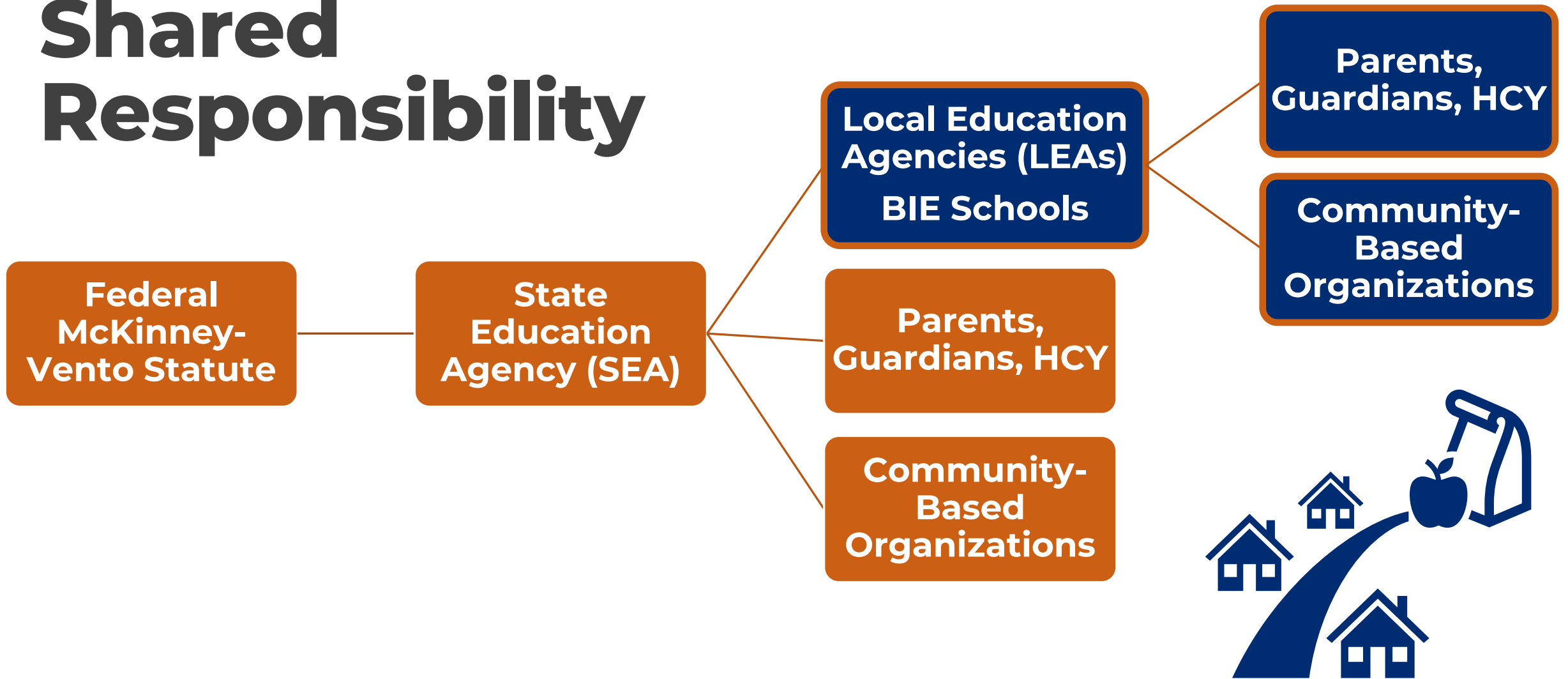
42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(1)(J)(iv)

AZ ESEA Consolidated State Plan, 2023, p. 56

Responsibilities of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison

1. Homeless youth are **identified** through outreach with other agencies;
2. Homeless youth are **enrolled** in and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school;
3. Access to federally required resources: HeadStart and other **preschool** programs, interventions under IDEA, etc.;
4. **Referral to well-being services**: health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, etc.;
5. **Inform** families and youth of **educational opportunities** with meaningful opportunities to participate;
6. Provide understandable **public notice of educational rights** in locations frequented by homeless youth, guardians, and unaccompanied youth: schools, shelters, public libraries, soup kitchens;
7. Mediate enrollment **disputes** according to federal guidance;
8. Inform family and youth of all **transportation** services;
9. Provide **professional development** and support for all stakeholders who serve homeless students; and
10. Assist **unaccompanied youth** with: enrollment, academic access and success, and notification of “Independent” status and assistance for FAFSA.

Shared Responsibility



“LEAs must **develop, review, and revise policies** to remove **barriers** to the **identification, enrollment, and retention** of children and youth (including preschool-aged children and unaccompanied youth) experiencing homelessness in school, including barriers to enrollment (re-enrollment) and retention due to outstanding fees or fines, or absences.”

42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(I)

McKinney-Vento Act

Removal of Barriers

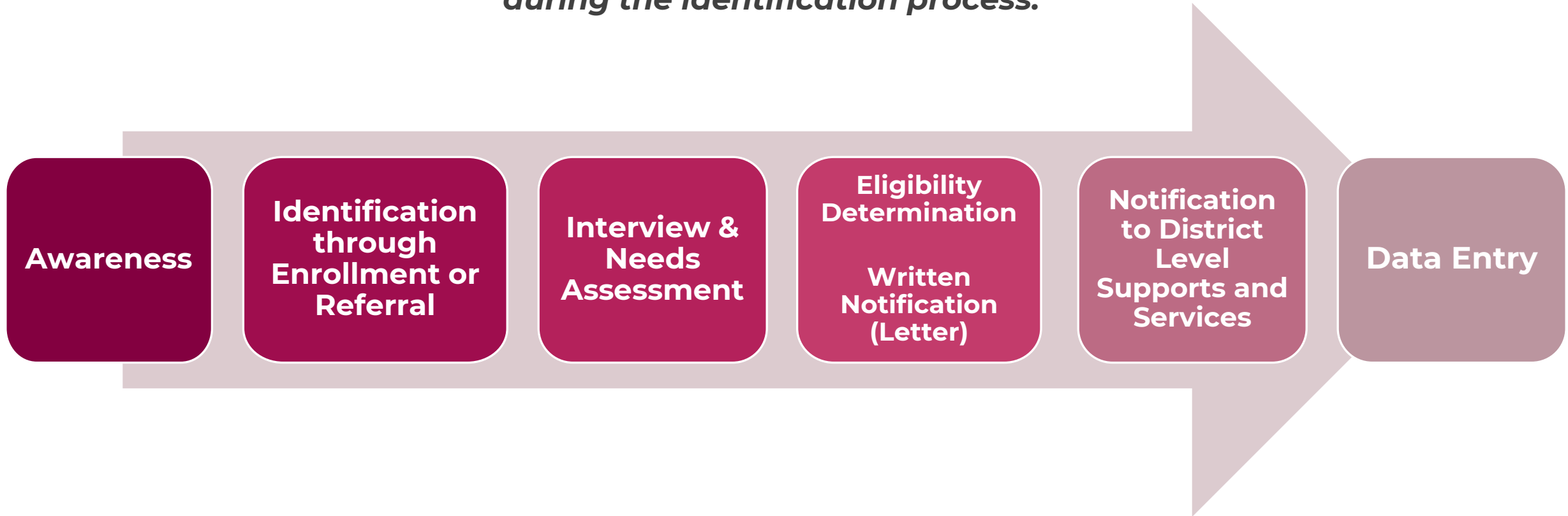




Identification & Immediate Enrollment

Identification Process

The Arizona HEP provides the following guidance to support the progression and steps during the identification process.





**Proof of
Residence**



**Birth
Certificate**



Immunizations



**School
Records**



**Proof of
Guardianship**

Supporting Immediate Enrollment Through Barrier Removal
Enroll First. Resolve Documentation Barriers Later.

Cultural View of Family and Homelessness

Understanding the Factors that Deter Native Students & Families from Self-Identifying

Lack of Understanding of the McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness

“Native American families may not consider circumstances like sharing the housing of others or substandard housing as homelessness, particularly in areas where poor housing conditions are widespread.”

Differing Definitions

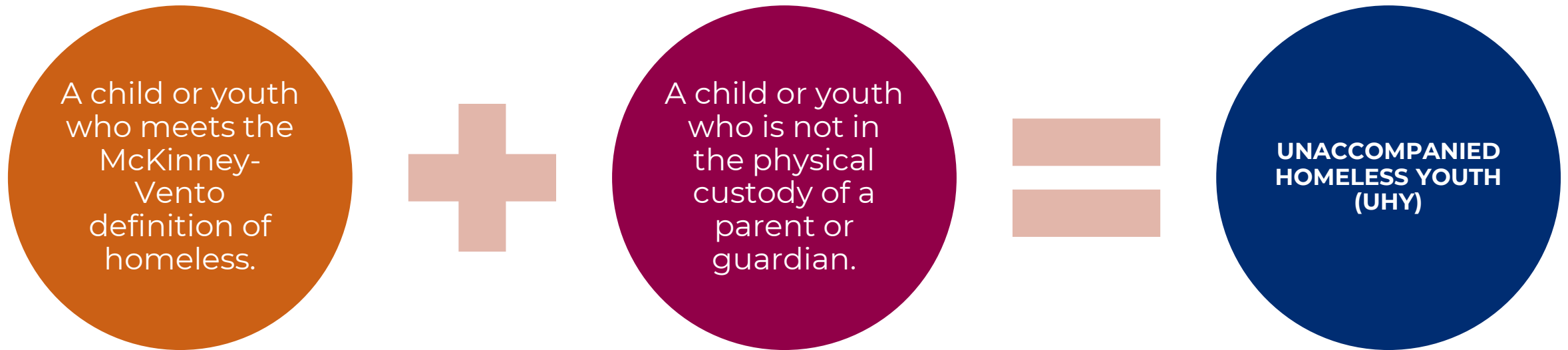
Tribal definitions of family, guardianship, and “home” often differ from those in federal law, which can complicate identification, particularly of unaccompanied homeless youth

Lack of Traditional Shelter or Motels

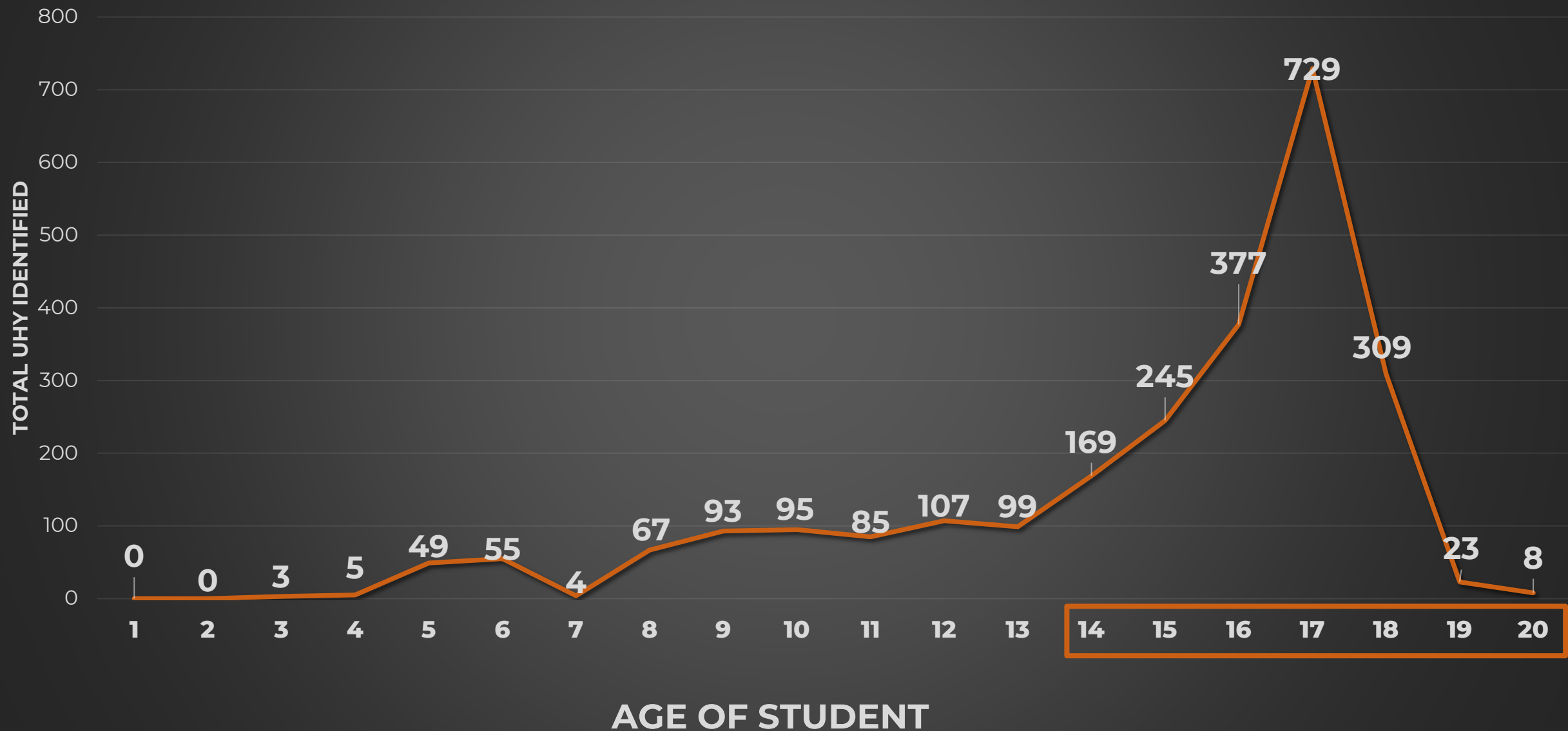
With few shelters or motels in Indian Country, students experiencing homelessness are more likely to stay with others temporarily (“doubled-up”), making identification more difficult.

Identification Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY)

The term **unaccompanied youth** includes a **homeless** child or youth **not** in the **physical custody of a parent or guardian**. Children of all ages (PS-12th grade) may be unaccompanied youth.



2025 Total Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY) by Age



Identification & Referral

Early Childhood Homeless Children

McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons must ensure that families, children, and youth experiencing homelessness have **access to** and **receive educational services** for which such families, children, and youths are eligible, including services through:

HeadStart and
Early HeadStart
programs

AzEIP
(Arizona Early
Intervention
Program)

Services under
part C of IDEA

LEA
administered
preschool
programs

Close the Achievement Gap

Supplemental Support

*What can be done by the LEA to supplement existing efforts to close the achievement gap?
What educational support will increase their opportunity for success?*

**Clothing and shoes
necessary to participate
in physical education
classes**

**Student fees that are
necessary to participate
in the general education
program;**

Personal school supplies;

**Counseling services to
address anxiety related
to homelessness that is
impeding learning;**

**Outreach services to
students living in
shelters, motels, and
other temporary
residences;**

**Extended learning time
(before and after school,
Saturday classes, summer
school, etc.) to compensate
for lack of quiet time for
homework in shelters or
other overcrowded living
conditions;**

**Tutoring services,
especially in shelters or
other locations where
homeless students live;**

**Fees for Advanced
Placement (AP) and
International
Baccalaureate (IB)
testing;**

**Fees for college entrance
exams such as the SAT or
ACT; and**

**GED testing for school-
age students**

What are the reported numbers of homeless children and youth in our State?



- Statewide Data Over the Years
- Rate of Homelessness Among Native American Students.

National Data 2022-2023 SY

Rate of Homelessness Among Native American Students

450K

Native
American
students
enrolled in
U.S. Public
Schools

46K

Native
American
students
enrolled in
BIE schools

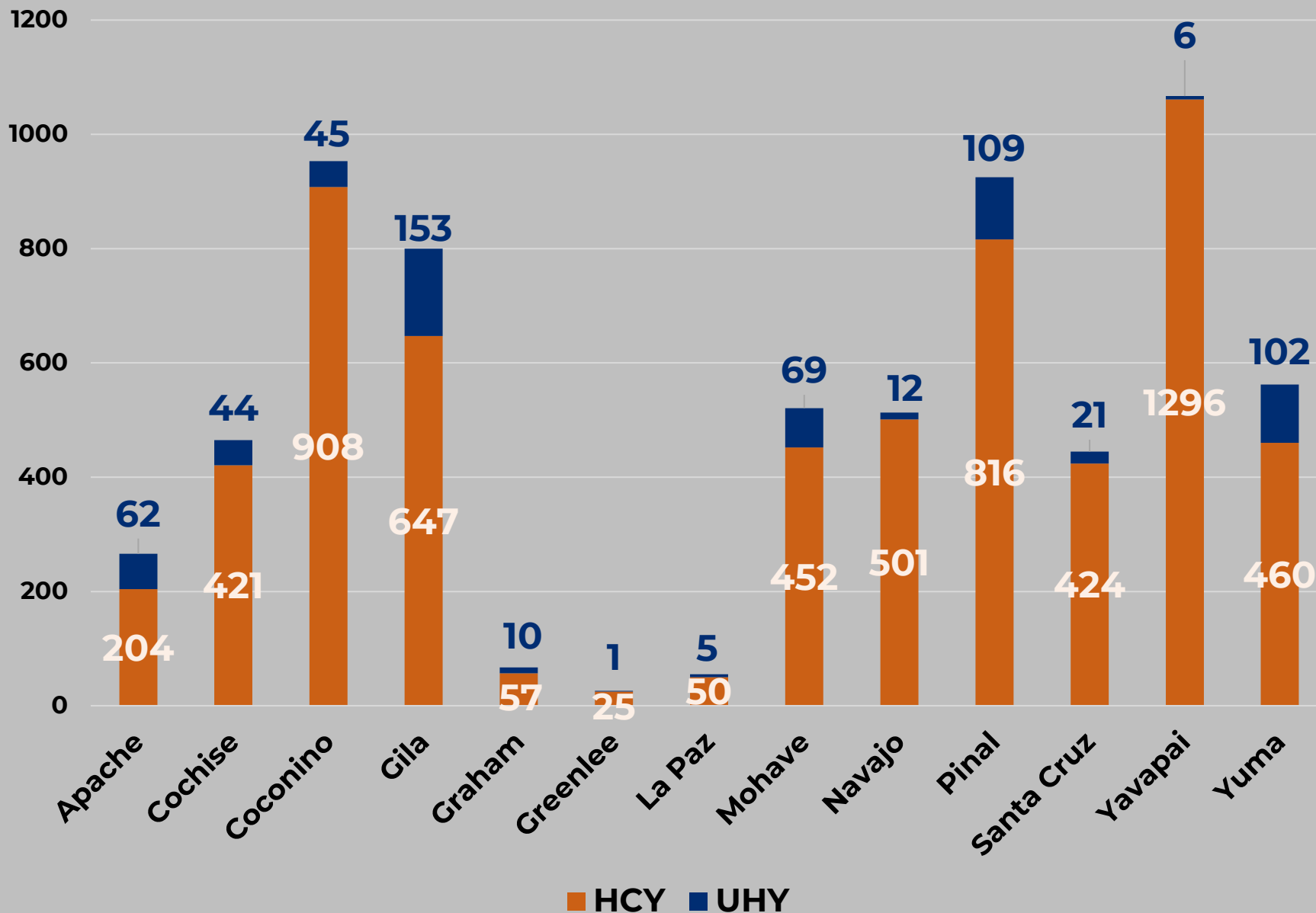
6%

of Native
American
students in
public
schools
identified as
homeless

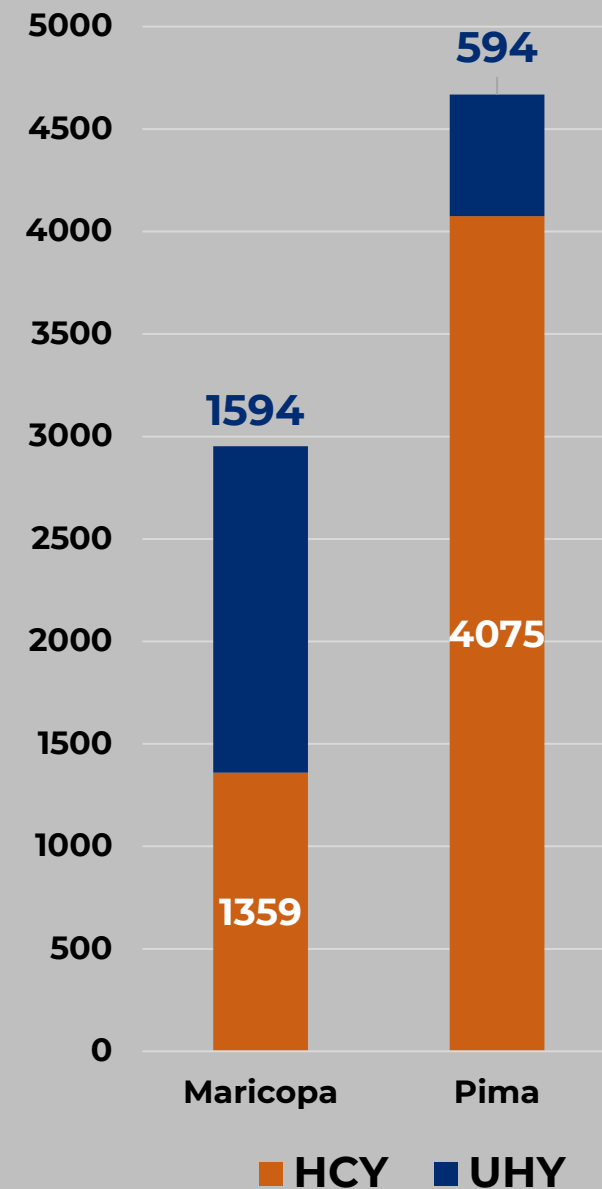
5.2%

of Native
American
students in
BIE schools
identified as
homeless

Arizona Data HCY and UHY by County - SY 2025-2026



HCY and UHY by County SY 2025 (Maricopa & Pima)



How can you support homeless children and youth in your Community?



- Shared Responsibility
- Resources & Tools to Have Available
 - Rights of Homeless students
 - Arizona Student Residency Questionnaire
 - Public Notice Posters
- Collaboration
 - Why Collaborate
 - Recommendations
 - Know Who to Contact

“Each local educational agency **liaison** for homeless children and youths, designated under paragraph (1)(J)(ii), shall **ensure** that **homeless children** and **youth** (including preschool-aged children and unaccompanied homeless youth) are **identified** by school personnel through **outreach** and **coordination** activities with other entities and agencies.”

42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)(A)(i)

McKinney-Vento Act

Outreach and Coordination



Opportunities to Enhance Collaboration



Invite McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison to provide training for your organization



Attend annual training provided by the Arizona HEP Office or ask a local Liaison about training



Share your knowledge with others of the McKinney-Vento Act with others



Be familiar with the Rights of Homeless Children and Youth and the SRQ



Know how to locate the list of McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons



Resources from the Arizona Homeless Education Program

Bookmark
these tools!



[Guidance & Sample Documents](#)

[Professional Learning](#)

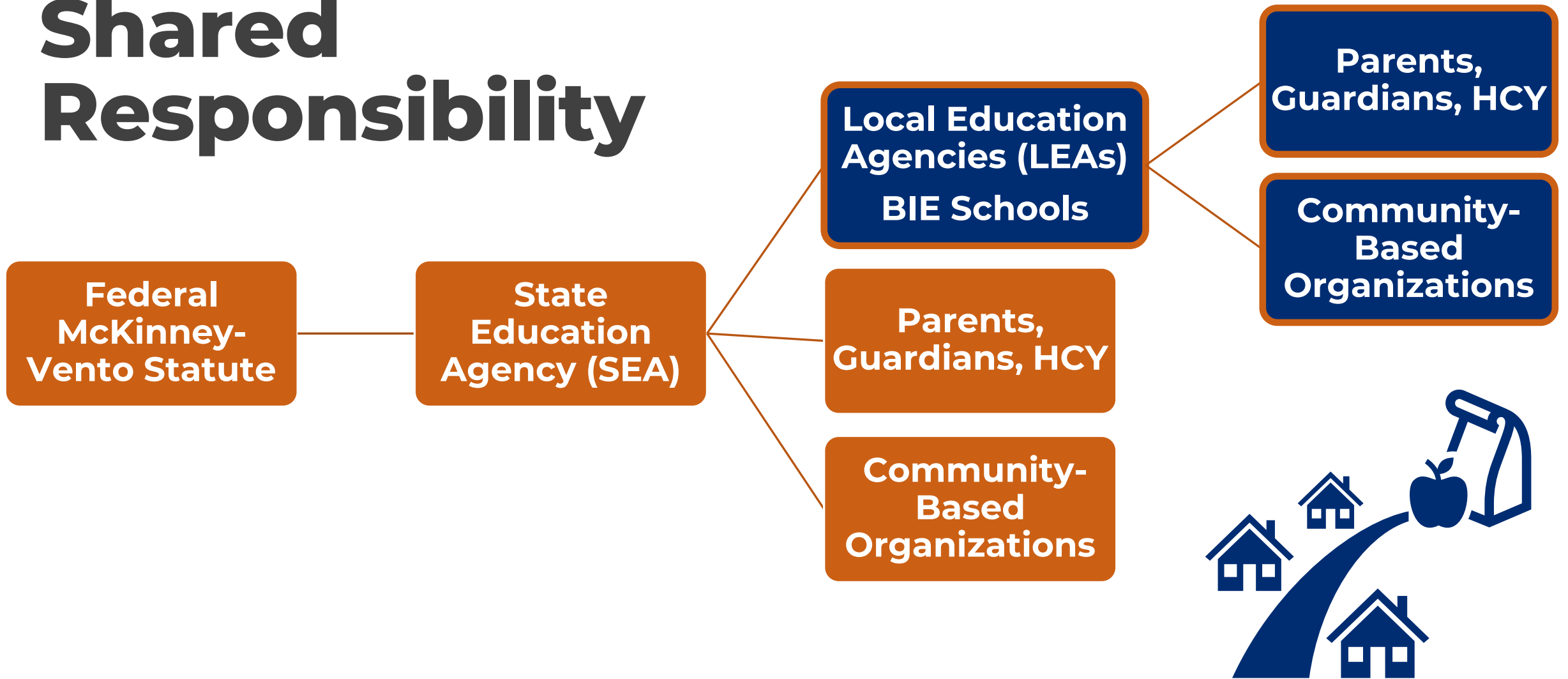
[Arizona Homeless Education Program Homepage](#)

[McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison Contact List](#)

[Data](#)

The screenshot shows the official website for the Arizona Homeless Education Program. At the top is the Arizona Department of Education logo and navigation links for Parents, Educators, Programs, About ADE, and ADEConnect. The main heading reads "Welcome to the Arizona Homeless Education Program". Below this is a large banner with the text "YOUR CHILD DESERVES AN EDUCATION" and the Arizona Department of Education logo. To the right of the banner is a sidebar with a list of links: Arizona Homeless Education Program Homepage, McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaisons, Grant Funding, Homeless Education Program Monitoring, Arizona Homeless Education Program Data, Parents, Guardians, and Youth, Community-Based Organizations, and Transportation Requirements for Local Education Agencies. The main content area below the banner includes the "Arizona Homeless Education Program Mission" statement, "Our Governing Statute" section, and a "Contact" section with the name Rita Rodriguez, State Homeless Education Program Coordinator, and contact information: homeless@azed.gov, (602) 542-4963, and a link to contact the department.

Shared Responsibility



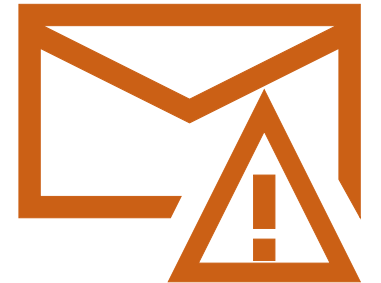
Collaboration Opportunity

Arizona Homeless Education
Program (HEP) - Collaboration
Request Form



Technical Assistance

Arizona Department of Education
Homeless Education Program
(602)542-4963
homeless@azed.gov





Thank You

Q&A