



**Homelessness & Housing Support  
Services Racial Equity Toolkit Analysis  
November 2021**



**Seattle** Department of  
Education & Early Learning

## Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Homelessness and Housing Support Services Background and Overview
  - a. Background
  - b. Goals and Outcomes
  - c. Centered Students
- III. HHS RET Team and Process
  - a. The Racial Equity Toolkit (RET)
  - b. HHS RET Team
  - c. Roles, Responsibilities, and Toolkit Analysis
  - d. Limitations
- IV. RET Team Recommendations
- V. Conclusion

## Executive Summary

In accordance with the Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy Implementation & Evaluation (I&E) Plan, the Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) conducted a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis related to the Homelessness and Housing Support Services (HHS) investment area, with specific focus on program elements that could have inequitable outcomes for Seattle youth. DEEL is committed to apply RETs toward FEPP Levy budgetary, programmatic, and policy decisions in order to minimize harm and maximize benefits to Seattle’s communities of color. The FEPP Levy I&E Plan specifies that the HHS RET review draft policies and contracting structures in alignment with the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI).

To conduct the HHS RET analysis, DEEL worked in collaboration with a RET Team totaling 23 individuals representing the City of Seattle, Seattle Public Schools (SPS), and individuals representing community-based organizations who work with students and families experiencing housing instability. Through a series of monthly meetings and engagements spanning from March 2021 through October 2021, the RET Team addressed questions focused on eight program elements categorized as follows:

<b>HHS RET Areas of Analysis</b>	
<i>Category</i>	<i>Element</i>
Emergency Assistance Funding	Eligible use of funds Distribution of available HHS funds
Outreach and Engagement	HHS provider and school district collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student identification</li><li>• Contact and communications</li><li>• Referrals</li><li>• Staffing</li></ul> Student/family enrollment barriers
Connection to Services and Programming	Student/family service needs Youth programming and support Continuous improvement of program design and implementation Culturally and linguistically responsive

The following report provides pertinent background and information on HHS as well as additional detail on the HHS RET Team, the process used to conduct its analysis, and the team’s recommendations.

## Homelessness and Housing Support Services - Program Background and Overview

### A. Background

Recent estimates indicate that there are over 1,800 students experiencing homelessness in Seattle School District. Seattle School District's McKinney Vento (MKV) Office is a federally funded program operating under the principle that students experiencing homelessness are guaranteed the right to a free, appropriate, public education. The MKV Act ensures students experiencing homelessness can remain enrolled in schools they have been attending, whether or not they still meet residency requirements, guarantees students have access to the transportation they need to attend school, and waives some documentation requirements. Neither MKV, nor Seattle School District, provide funding for housing to MKV eligible families.

Although the City of Seattle and King County have a robust homeless service delivery system, many MKV eligible families are unable to access those services. To receive City-funded housing support services, a family must be in a shelter or unhoused. Over half of Seattle School District's MKV families are not literally homeless but are living in precariously unstable housing situations. These families are often "doubled-up" or staying in someone else's home with no feasible way to obtain stable housing of their own. This experience can be time-limited and disruptive to a students' school experience.

Research shows that unstable housing often results in the same academic outcomes for students as those that are literally homeless. Students experiencing homelessness—whether living in hotels/motels, in shelters, unsheltered, or doubled up—have significantly lower academic outcomes than their housed peers, even when comparing to low-income, housed peers. Statewide, students experiencing homelessness (including doubled-up students) have a 62% attendance rate, compared to an 86% attendance rate for their housed peers. Further, three in four students experiencing homelessness do not meet the proficiency level on state math assessments and have a four-year graduation rate that is more than 25 percentage points lower than their housed peers (55% versus 81%). Student mobility is greater for homeless students as well. During SY 2015-16, 10% of Seattle School District's homeless students changed schools compared to only 3% of stably housed students.

While students who are doubled up or unstably housed have similar academic outcomes as students who are literally homeless, they do not have similar access to housing resources to support family stabilization resulting in a services gap.

### B. Goals and Outcomes

The intent of HHS investments is to address a specific service gap for students who are doubled up or unstably housed by connecting families experiencing unstable housing to emergency assistance dollars or other existing housing support services to prevent further homelessness. DEEL works with the City's Human Services Department (HSD) to create a partnership with a community-based housing service provider that administers the prevention funding in order to achieve the following goal and outcomes:

HHS Goal and Outcomes	
<b>Goal</b>	SPS students identified for support through the federal McKinney-Vento Act (MKV) obtain and/or maintain stable housing.
<b>Outcomes</b>	Prevention of homelessness and transitions to stable housing Non-academic and socioeconomic barriers to learning are reduced or eliminated.

	Race based opportunity gaps are closed Student attendance and mobility improve
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To achieve this goal and set of outcomes, the HHS investment area funds three strategies:

1. **Emergency Assistance Funding:** The housing provider will help the family by issuing flexible, emergency assistance dollars to prevent the family from falling further into homelessness and help stabilize the family. Funds can be used to pay for rent, housing deposits, and other housing-related expenses.
2. **Referral/Connection to Services:** If the family’s needs are beyond what the housing support service partner can provide through prevention, they will connect the family to alternative housing resources including services provided by the City of Seattle, King County, and the Seattle Housing Authority. The School Point of Contact will also refer the student to the McKinney Vento Office at Seattle School District for a separate housing assessment.
3. **Client-Centered Housing Case Management:** Progressive engagement (providing minimum assistance necessary to resolve the housing crisis, for the shortest time possible). Assistance with housing search if necessary. Connection with other community resources.

### C. Centered Student Population

Students experience housing instability and homelessness on a continuum. The population of students centered by HHS investments is designed to be inclusive of all students experiencing housing instability, with an emphasis on serving students furthest from educational justice, aligning with the City of Seattle’s [FEPP Implementation and Evaluation Plan](#).

HHS funding is designed to serve SPS students who are unstably housed but who could likely become stabilized with a small amount of financial or housing counseling support. Unstably housed students include:

- Those living doubled up or in other unstable housing, as identified by school-level or MKV Office staff.
- Both MKV students and non-MKV students who are experiencing housing instability.
- Students who are under threat of or on the verge of housing instability.

In some instances, the family’s need may extend beyond the HHS funded programs if they are living in shelters or are literally homeless. In this instance, the family will be connected to the City and County homeless service delivery system.

## HHS RET Team and Process

### A. The City of Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative and Racial Equity Toolkit

The Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) is a citywide effort to end institutionalized racism and race-based disparities in City of Seattle government. “RSJI builds on the work of civil rights movement and the ongoing efforts of individuals and groups in Seattle to confront racism. The initiative’s long-term goal is to change the underlying system that creates race-based disparities in (the) community and to achieve racial equity.” As part of the overall initiative, the Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) lays out a process to help end individual, institutional, and structural racism inherent in government systems. The RET is intended to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts on racial equity, and involves the engagement of relevant stakeholders participating in a careful analysis of a certain body of work, in this case, the HHS investment.

### B. HHS RET Team

To conduct the analysis, a 23-member HHS RET Team was established and selected based on their background and experience. The composition of the team consisted of City of Seattle staff, Seattle Public Schools, and community stakeholders. Below is a list of individuals who participated on the HHS RET Team:

RET Team Member	Membership	Organization
Kimberly Lee	Community	Refuge Women’s Alliance
Georgina Thiak	Community	Refuge Women’s Alliance
Mahnaz Eshetu	Community	Refuge Women’s Alliance
Crisann Brooks	Community	Refuge Women’s Alliance
Marshaun Barber	Community	Reclaiming Our Greatness
Nick Terrones	Community	United Indians of All Tribes
Linda Taylor	Community	Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Abdillahi Mohammed	Community	Somali Youth and Family Club
Daniela Lizarraga	Community	El Centro de la Raza
Tracey Thompson	SPS	Lowell Elementary
Demetrice Wheeler	SPS	Seattle Public Schools
Ariel Davis	Government	Seattle Housing Authority
Jeanice Hardy	Provider	YWCA
Metesa Greene	Provider	YWCA
Tyra Williams	SPS	McKinney Vento
Jeanea Proctor Mills	SPS	McKinney Vento
Chrissy Dulik Dalos	SPS	Seattle Public Schools
Arielle Washington	Government	City of Seattle – Dept of Education and Early Learning
Maleah Davis	Youth	YWCA
Vik Cheema	Government	City of Seattle – Dept of Education and Early Learning
Ty Edwards	Government	City of Seattle – Dept of Education and Early Learning
Chris Alejano	Government	City of Seattle – Dept of Education and Early Learning
Rani Hanstad	Government	City of Seattle – Dept of Education and Early Learning

### C. Roles, Responsibilities, and Toolkit Analysis

As part of the HHS RET Team, members played an essential role in surfacing the investment’s benefits and/or burdens on community in terms of racial equity. This included analyzing the program for impacts and alignment with racial equity outcomes, developing strategies to create greater racial equity or minimize unintended consequences, and providing recommendations for consideration by DEEL leadership. The RET Team met monthly between March 2021 and October 2021 and utilized their time together discussing various topics, engaging one another in small groups between monthly meetings, reviewing materials, participating in and designing community outreach and engagement efforts, and providing their individual expertise. RET Team community members and members of the community that participated in RET outreach activities were compensated for their time. Outlined below are the tasks and topics/objectives that were covered during the HHS RET Team meetings.

<b>HHS RET Team Meetings</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	
March	RET Team 101	Introductions Purpose Relationship building RET Team roles and responsibilities Racial Equity Toolkit overview
April	YWCA Student Stability Program	
May	Emergency Funding	Eligible use of funds Fund distribution
June		
July	Connection to Services and Programming	Student and family services Youth programming and support culturally and linguistically responsive programming
August		
September	Outreach & Engagement	HHS provider and school district collaboration Student/family enrollment barriers
October	RET Analysis Recommendation Report	Review and feedback of HHS RET Team recommendation report

The toolkit analysis is designed as a six-step process. However, the steps are not meant to be followed in sequence, rather as a process to ensure authentic engagement. The table below shows how the team engaged with each step leading towards the development of RET Team recommendations:

<b>HHS RET Analysis</b>		
<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Summary of Action</b>
Set Outcomes	Leadership communicates key community outcomes for racial equity	The RET Team established the Racial Equity Outcome to accelerate equitable access to HHS investment housing support services and emergency funding for Native American, African American, Latino American, Asian Pacific Islanders, Asian American, LGBTQIA+, undocumented, immigrant & refugee students in Seattle Public Schools who are experiencing housing instability and at-risk of

	to guide analysis.	<p>losing housing; by empowering, engaging and equipping families to foster stability and self-sufficiency.</p> <p>The RET Team was given three major areas to analyze in the toolkit analysis which were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency Funding</li> <li>• Connection to Services and Programming</li> <li>• Outreach and Engagement</li> </ul> <p>The RET Team established community agreements and norms for collaborating and to guide engagement.</p>
Involve Stakeholders + Analyze Data	Gather information from community and staff on how the issue benefits or burdens the community in terms of racial equity.	<p>The RET Team learned from YWCA SSP staff to help inform the team on current practices, program implementation concerns and successes, data, and equitable practices.</p> <p>The RET Team met with City of Seattle’s Department of Education and Early Learning staff for an overview and analysis of HHS investment policy elements and to help inform the RET team on how these investments fit into DEEL’s larger K12 strategy.</p> <p>The RET Team also consulted <a href="#">Building Changes</a> on McKinney Vento data, as well as processes and strategies to support students experiencing homelessness. Building Changes presented to the RET Team during the May meeting.</p> <p>On behalf of the RET Team, DEEL conducted a community wide survey to gather feedback from students and families who have experienced housing instability to help inform the RET process and create more equitable City of Seattle policies and programmatic practices.</p>
Determine Benefits and/or Burden	Analyze issue for impacts and alignment with racial equity outcomes.	<p>The RET team reviewed the current homelessness supports available to students and analyzed how these supports were supporting unstably housed students of color and how they were causing harm.</p> <p>The RET team also reviewed part of the RFI application to determine if a proposed change regarding youth programming could improve racial equity outcomes for unstably housed students as well as for community organizations.</p> <p>Outcomes from this step will be found within the recommendations from the RET Team.</p>



Advance Opportunity or Minimize Harm	Develop strategies to create greater racial equity or minimize unintended consequences.	The RET team discussed elements of HHS investments that could be improved or optimized to enhance opportunities to close racial equity gaps. The RET team focused on how existing program design could be calibrated to prevent unintentional harm and exclusion of unstably housed families of color.  Outcomes from this step will be found within the recommendations from the RET Team.
Evaluate. Raise Awareness. Be Accountable.	Track impacts on communities of color overtime. Continue to communicate with and involve stakeholders. Document unresolved issues	This step will depend upon which recommendations DEEL adopts in the upcoming RFI, which will provide guidance on what elements to follow and evaluate.
Report Back	Share information learned from analysis and unresolved issue with Department Leadership and Change Team.	This report will share learned information to DEEL leadership, LOC, Mayor’s Office, City Council, HSD leadership, and SPS leadership.

**D. Limitations**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the HHS RET Team ran into challenges ensuring consistency in attendance and engagement utilizing a remote approach. While the original HHS RET Team member list represented a diverse set of community organizations specializing in serving underserved populations, these partners have been continuously impacted by staffing changes and limited capacity brought on by the pandemic, preventing every RET Team member from attending every meeting, or being able to attend for the entire length of each meeting.

To offset some of these limitations, DEEL’s Strategy and Engagement unit, on behalf of the HHS RET Team, conducted surveys for youth who had experienced housing instability. The feedback from the survey provided the RET Team with additional insight on the topics explored. Finally, the team also leaned into the diversity of expertise within the group. The breadth of backgrounds and experiences that members brought to the discussions helped provide additional, valuable feedback that could be used to inform report recommendations.

## RET Team Recommendations

The Homelessness and Housing Support Services RET Team was given eight program elements to review which were grouped into three categories: Emergency Assistance Funding, Outreach and Engagement, and Connection to Services and Programming. This section details the recommendations borne out of the team’s outreach engagement, review of best and promising practices used by organizations that serve unstably housed students and families, and dialogue amongst members. All program elements reviewed were deemed essential to building a high quality and equity focused program. The priorities take into consideration the needs identified by the community and HHS RET Team, the overall impact on program, and the ability to implement recommendations in a timely manner.

<b>RET Team Recommendations</b>		
<b>Emergency Assistance Funding</b>		
<i>Element</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Eligible use of funds	What are emergency assistance funds being used for?	<p>The RET Team believes that eligible uses of funds are comprehensive, but that more clarity would be helpful to the provider, so they can pass this on to their partners and clients. The team recommends including an exhaustive list in future RFI and contract documents.</p> <p>Specifically, the RET Team recommends explicitly naming that the following are eligible uses of emergency assistance funds if they support stabilizing the family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs to secure housing (application fees, credit check fees, security deposit, first &amp; last month’s rent)</li> <li>• Housing essentials (bedding, cookware)</li> <li>• Renters or home insurance</li> <li>• Rental and utility arrears</li> <li>• Transportation support</li> <li>• Interpreter fees</li> </ul>
Distribution of available HHS funds	How are emergency assistance funds being distributed across those uses?	In order to ensure funds are distributed quickly and families have low barrier to access, the RET Team recommended that DEEL modify future RFI and contract documents to increase amount limits per household, clarify that funds are flexible across more uses (see above), and expand eligibility requirements to include students who are not enrolled in SPS.
<b>Outreach and Engagement</b>		
<i>Element</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
HHS provider and school district collaboration	How can provider and district collaboration be improved for families’ benefit?	The RET Team sees SPS district staff as essential partners in connecting families to services. While many on the team have collaborated with SPS successfully, there is much room for improvement that can translate to more families being served and earlier. The RET Team recommends that DEEL facilitates more frequent communication between provider and school liaisons and establish school point of contacts.
Student/family enrollment barriers	How can identified barriers to students and families to enrolling in HHS provider programs be resolved?	The RET Team focused on three main areas affecting enrollment in housing programs in the City: accessibility, awareness, and ease/support. While each of these areas existed prior to the pandemic, the team testified to the increased challenge that the pandemic has added to solving them.

		<p>The RET Team acknowledged how the current housing provider and other community organizations have risen to the occasion and adapted to serve families despite a shifting landscape and strained resources. Still, they share the following recommendations per area, noting that DEEL should specify these practices in RFI and contract language:</p> <p><b>Accessibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make information and resources available in plain language, translated versions.</li> <li>• Assist with transportation to provider site.</li> <li>• Offer support with I-94 renewal and other immigration requirements.</li> </ul> <p><b>Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage social media platforms and outlets to promote program.</li> <li>• Utilize community engagement events.</li> <li>• Consider a mass text app to text community updates, such as what SHA uses.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ease &amp; Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline enrollment process so families can rapidly enroll, with full enrollment after families are being connected to services.</li> <li>• Staff support to families in completing applications.</li> <li>• Simplify definition of homelessness.</li> </ul>
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**Connections to Services and Programming**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Student/family service needs	How do we integrate youth and family voice into continuous improvement, design, and implementation of program and support services?	<p>When considering youth and family voice, the RET Team was adamant that these voices be amplified before, during, and after the upcoming RFI process as well as program implementation. The team feels that these voices must be heard, in addition to community providers. The team also felt strongly that DEEL and the City of Seattle should hire a consultant to facilitate any listening / focus groups / permanent advisory councils, and that the City commits to incorporating the feedback gleaned so as to not further deteriorate trust in the city among vulnerable communities.</p> <p>The RET Team also recommends that any parent or youth involvement should be compensated.</p>
Youth programming and support	What type of youth programming and support should a provider offer through their youth-focused component?	<p>The RET Team did reach consensus on the types of youth programming that should be offered and felt it was critical that any program support leadership and self-efficacy of involved youth. Select recommended topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Advisory Council</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Mental health</li> <li>• Legal awareness (know your rights training, how to respond if you are stopped by police, law making, how laws impact our communities)</li> <li>• Advocacy for yourself and others</li> <li>• Financial Literacy</li> <li>• Civic engagement</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Culinary for sites that don't have a kitchen staff or funding</li> </ul>

		<p>The RET Team also recommends that DEEL and the City of Seattle prioritize youth experiencing homelessness into city programming enrollment, scholarships, and putting forth policy in reserving seats for these youth.</p>
	<p>Is integrating a youth program component to future requests for investments (RFI's) something that we should require or leave up to organizations to decide?</p>	<p>The overwhelming majority of RET Team members believed that future HHS providers should have the choice of whether to offer youth programming as part of their services, which aligns with the current model. This group was adamant that forcing a great provider to provide youth programming when it's not their strong suit can have unintended detrimental effects.</p> <p>Rather than requiring it from the City, the RET Team believes the provider should listen to the community if youth programming is what they need. The provider can contract someone who does provide youth programming. If the provider opts to offer youth programming, the contract should include additional support and funding above the original contract award.</p> <p>However, several members did feel that DEEL should expressly add this as a requirement in the next RFI process, citing that the HHS investment is intended to serve students and therefore must include a youth programming element to be truly student-centered.</p>
<p>Continuous improvement of program design and implementation</p>		<p>The RET Team agreed that a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process should be adopted by providers of HHS services. The team also agrees that DEEL should reflect this expectation in the RFI as well as specify how DEEL will support the provider through this process in the contract. The team recommends that CQI efforts focus on case management, with specific recommendations for these areas are below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve system for client follow-up to ensure families are connected with services.</li> <li>• Instruct case managers to provide unconditional and “hand-holding” support.</li> <li>• Hire case managers with skills to break down barriers and build trust.</li> <li>• Help families build support systems outside of provider.</li> <li>• Coach families to build self-efficacy, access resources, and gain independence.</li> <li>• Support obtaining and access identification, birth certificates, SSN, immigration documents.</li> </ul>
<p>Culturally and linguistically responsive</p>	<p>How can we integrate cultural and linguistic responsiveness into services and programs for students and families?</p>	<p>The RET Team believes that cultural and linguistic responsiveness is a non-negotiable for serving unstably housed youth and their families. Overall, the team believes that the organizations that serve Seattle youth in this area already believe in and prioritize cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and that this is evident in their care models. However, the team recommends that a) DEEL codify best practices in future RFI documents and contracts, and b) champion more investment in municipal resources available to organizations that have earned the trust of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, so that they can better serve them.</p> <p><b>Best Practices for housing providers (include in RFI, contract)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize translation tools and train staff on cultural awareness.</li> <li>• Promote linguistic awareness around non-monolithic groups (e.g., learn about different tribal and cultural languages and dialects).</li> </ul>

- Develop awareness of preferences of dual-language learners to honor learning and use of both languages (e.g., don't assume non-English speaking parents want their students be taught in their home language).
- Clarify availability of services to non-focus groups (e.g., non-Hispanics can receive services at El Centro de la Raza).
- Hire staff that reflects the populations they serve, both culturally and linguistically.
- Treat families with dignity and respect.
- Ensure families are in a safe place before sharing paperwork and details.
- Make paperwork families fill out user-friendly, and/or provide in chunks.
- Integrate cultural events for folks with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and different home countries.

**Recommendations for DEEL and City of Seattle:**

- Develop a central translation and interpretation unit available for CBOs to leverage.
- Allow family/student paperwork to be submitted in non-English languages
- Prioritize women and children of color.
- Analyze how paperwork and documentation needed for provider contract can be a barrier to render services and support the families in need.
- Recognize that contract management and reporting systems are rooted in a white supremacist culture, and that this system can oppress the people these services were meant to serve.
- Ensure criteria for eligible families are refugee or immigrant friendly.

## **Conclusion**

From its launch in 2019, the Homelessness and Housing Support Services investments were designed with students at the focus and with equity in mind. These investments can provide an increased stability for Seattle's most vulnerable students. To date, the number of families served by these investments do not yet correlate with the scale of investment. However, this is because the program still iterating and finding ways to adapt to the COVID environment. In order to achieve greater success with HHS investments, a continuous improvement agenda must be prioritized, requiring the rethinking and reimagining of certain aspects of the program. The recommendations provided in this report serve as a starting point to initiate some of those changes, and the HHS RET Team humbly submits this report for DEEL's consideration.