

Guidance for the Use of and Access to GEMS Homeless Data

There are two types of reports on Homeless Data available through GEMS. Both reports provide a wide range of data with a number of implications and uses.

1. **Individual Student Report** – This report can be accessed by entering the name and date of birth of the student. The report will show a history of homelessness for any student who has been enrolled in any school in the state of Montana. This report can be accessed by anyone who has knowledge of a student's name and birth date and is not limited to the student's current district of enrollment.
 - a. **Who should have access to this report?** There are a number of staff members who may find this information beneficial when working with individual students. Classroom teachers, Team Lead teachers, school counselors/psychologists, RTI teams, special education teachers, limited English proficiency teachers, Title VII teachers, homeless liaisons, home school coordinators, parent involvement specialists, and other teachers working with special populations may be given information regarding individual homeless students. Each district should determine which programs are involved in providing services to homeless children when determining access to this data.
 - b. **How should this data be used?** Homeless students are more likely to have gaps in their learning due to episodes of homelessness and high mobility which are often linked to poor attendance. Classroom teachers who are aware of these issues can determine where gaps occur and create individualized programs to address student's needs. Other programs which may provide services to homeless children should also be aware of the child's homeless status as they create IEPs or other types of plans to meet the student's learning needs. School counselors and other school-based mental health professionals should consider placing homeless and previously homeless children in support groups for children who have experienced grief/loss or trauma. Many homeless children exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and have a higher rate of exposure to incidents of drug/alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse, community violence, and trauma related to loss of housing, personal possessions and friends. Homeless children also exhibit symptoms related to chronic hunger and malnutrition, and lack of access to basic medical care. School-based health care professionals should provide homeless children the same basic health care screenings upon enrollment if possible. These may include vision, hearing, dental and other health screenings provided to housed children in the district. Homeless data should also be shared with school nutrition services at the time of enrollment or identification. All homeless children automatically qualify for free meals and do not need to complete income verification paperwork. Homeless children should also be assessed for Title I services.

2. **Schoolwide Homeless Report** – This report can be accessed by entering the school and school year requested. This report will give a district or school access to the names and information for all children in the district who are currently homeless or who have been homeless in any district within the last five years. This report only lists students who are currently enrolled in the district.
 - a. **Who should have access to this report?** This report should be used by administrators, school counselors, and other staff members who are responsible for program planning. This report should also be used to verify that all homeless students are properly coded in the district database and in AIM. The homeless liaison should verify this data with his/her own list of identified students. District staff may determine which of their programs provide services to homeless children and should have access to this data.
 - b. **How should this data be used?** Schools and districts should use this data in the planning and development of a homeless program which meets the needs of children and families in the district. Grade-level and school-wide teams should use this data to create programs which address learning gaps at each grade level. School-based mental health professionals may use this data in the design of counseling and support programs. Aggregate data may also be shared with community organizations and nonprofits for the purpose of collaborating with districts to provide services to homeless children and families. Care should be taken to provide data that is useful, but not detailed enough to identify individual families and children.

If you have questions or concerns regarding the use of GEMS Homeless Data, please feel free to contact the Interim State Coordinator for Homeless Education Jack O'Connor at joconnor2@mt.gov, (406) 444-3083, or the GEMS Help Desk at opigemshelpdesk@mt.gov. FERPA questions may be directed to the US Department of Education's Privacy Technical Assistance Center at PrivacyTA@ed.gov.