

McKinney Vento District Homeless Policy

Northwest Area School District

A. General Policy Statement:

The Northwest Area School District shall ensure that homeless children and youths shall have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.

B. Definitions:

“School of Origin” shall mean the school that a child or youth attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including preschool. School of origin shall also include any designated receiving school for the next grade level for all feeder schools when a student completes the final grade level served by the school of origin.

“Homeless children and youths” shall mean any individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and includes:

1. Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in hotels, motels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
2. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation of human beings;
3. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above (B-3).

“Unaccompanied Youth” shall mean a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. Unaccompanied youth are eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act regardless of the circumstances that led to their separation from family; this includes youth who ran away from home, and youth who were forced from the home by their families. The dynamics of family conflict or dysfunction often are very personal and sensitive, and may not be shared readily with school staff; as such, what students or parents disclose may be an inaccurate or incomplete representation of what has occurred within the family.

C. School Stability:

1. School Selection: Each school shall presume that keeping a homeless child or youth enrolled in that child's or youth's school of origin is in the child or youth's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.

To overcome the presumption that a child or youth should remain in his/her school of origin, the school staff shall consider student-centered factors including; the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth, giving priority to the request of the child's or youth's parent or guardian or in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth.

(See Appendix A for Best Interest Determination Worksheet)

2. Enrollment: Once the school is selected in accordance with the child's or youth's best interest, that child or youth shall be immediately enrolled even if the child or youth is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment including, but not limited to, previous academic records, immunization or other health records, proof of residency, or has missed any application or enrollment deadlines during any periods of homelessness.
3. Transportation: If the child or youth continues to attend his or her school of origin, transportation shall be provided promptly even if there is a dispute pending regarding which school is in the child's or youth's best interest to attend. Transportation will continue to be provided to and from the school of origin for the remainder of any academic year during which the child or youth becomes permanently housed.

D. PROCEDURES FOR ENROLLMENT OF HOMELESS STUDENTS

1. When contact is received by the District's Homeless Liaison from school administration, District registration office, shelter, etc., the following procedures will be followed:
 - a. The District Liaison will facilitate the student's immediate enrollment in school;
 - b. Contact the School Administration/Child Accounting to list student as homeless;
 - c. Contact parent/shelter to discuss services;
 - d. Arrange for transportation;
 - e. Ensure teachers and staff receive necessary information to assess education needs;
 - f. Arrange for Title I, and all educational services (special ed., vo. tech, etc.);
 - g. Ensure student receives free breakfast/lunch;
 - h. Begin documentation of student information.

- i. Refer student to appropriate school/district programs for support (SAP, IST, Tutoring, Child Study, etc.)
 - j. Ensure all parties receiving information are aware of safety and confidentiality issues and that homeless information is covered under FERPA.
2. When necessary, contact Regional Homeless Coordinator to determine if other services are required, i.e., medical, vouchers for clothing, food/supplies, housing, etc.
3. Complete administrative responsibilities:
 - a. Include student information on District Homeless list;
 - b. Submit student listing with District Liaison's signature to Food Service Liaison and Federal Program Coordinator;
 - c. Ensure all needs and services are documented;
 - d. If appropriate, review course of study, graduation/promotion requirements, determine if credit recovery is necessary due to homelessness;
 - e. Coordinate with community service providers as needed.

E. Records

Any record ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs, regarding each homeless child or youth shall be maintained:

1. Such that all records are available, in a timely fashion, when a child or youth enrolls in a new school or school district;
2. Any information about a homeless child's or youth's living situation shall be treated as a confidential student education record, and shall not be deemed to be directory information; and
3. In a manner consistent with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act.

F. Designation of McKinney Vento Local Educational Liaison:

Northwest Area School District shall identify an appropriate staff person to be the Local Educational Liaison (LEL) for all homeless children and youth attending ***Northwest Area School District***. The LEL responsibilities shall include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensure homeless children and youth are identified through outreach and coordination activities including coordination with school district personnel responsible for education and services to homeless children and youth, community agencies and Regional Coordinator for Pennsylvania Education for Children and youth Experiencing Homelessness;
2. Receive appropriate time and training in order to carry out the duties required by law, School Board Policy and this Administrative Policy;
3. Ensure homeless families and homeless children and youth are referred to health care, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing and any other appropriate services;
4. Ensure that homeless children and youths:
 - a. Are enrolled in school which includes attending classes and participating fully in school activities.
 - b. Have full and equal opportunity to meet the same challenging state academic standards as other children and youth;
 - c. Receiving individualized counseling from counselors to prepare and improve their readiness for higher education and vocational training including school selection, application, financial aid, and on campus supports.
 - d. And that Unaccompanied youths are informed of the status as independent students and may receive verification of such status for purpose of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
5. Ensure that school personnel providing services to children and youth experiencing homelessness receive required professional development and support.
6. Local liaison will coordinate and collaborate with Regional and State Coordinators for Homeless Education.

G. Dispute Resolution

1. The dispute procedure must be available for disputes over eligibility, as well as school selection or enrollment.
2. In the event of a dispute regarding where a child or youth should enroll, the child or youth shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought pending the final resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals. The district shall immediately provide the child's parent or guardian or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the youth a written explanation of the decision made regarding the school selection including the right to appeal such decision. This shall be provided in a manner and form understandable to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth and also included the Local Educational Liaison contact information.
3. The Local Educational Liaison shall aid the child, youth or family through further action in the process. (see SAMPLE School District Dispute Resolution Process) Appendix B

H. Training and Professional Development

1. The homeless liaison or designee will conduct training and sensitivity awareness activities for the following school staff on an annual basis:
 - a. Superintendent and/or designee
 - b. Principals
 - c. Assistant Principals
 - d. Federal Program Administrators
 - e. School Secretaries
 - f. Counselors
 - g. School Psychologists
 - h. School Nurses
 - i. Teachers and other Professional Employees
 - j. Support staff
2. The training and activities will be designed to increase staff awareness of homelessness, facilitate immediate enrollment, ensure compliance with the policy and procedures and increase sensitivity to children and youth in transition

I. Title I

Children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for Title I services, regardless of what school they attend. The trauma and instability of homelessness puts such students at risk of academic regression to warrant additional support. The Title I Coordinator will reserve such funds that are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to Title I students to children and youth in transition attending non-participating schools. The amount reserved shall be determined by a formula based upon per pupil Title I expenditure and developed jointly by the Title I Coordinator and the homeless liaison. Reserved funds will be used to provide education related support services to children and youth in transition, both in school and outside of school, and to remove barriers that prevent regular school attendance. The Northwest Area School District's Title I Plan will be coordinated with our McKinney-Vento services. Children and youth in transition will be assessed, reported on, and included in accountability systems, as required by state and federal law and regulations.

J. Free Meals

Hunger and poor nutrition are obvious barriers to learning. To help ensure that children and youth in transition are available for learning, The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all children and youth in transition are automatically eligible for free meals. On the day that the child or youth in transition enrolls in school, the enrolling school will submit the student's name to the Director of Food Services for immediate processing.

K. Outside Agencies and Services

District Liaison and other appropriate personnel should maintain a list of available local resource providers and should be prepared to refer the student and family for services as necessary.

L. Transportation

1. Without appropriate transportation, a student may not be able to continue attending his/her school of origin. To avoid such forced school transfers, transportation shall be provided to the school of origin for a child or youth in transition.
2. Transportation will be provided for the entire time that the youth has a right to attend that school, as defined above, including during pending disputes.
3. The homeless liaison shall request transportation to and from the school of origin for unaccompanied youth. The length of the commute will be considered in determining the feasibility of placement in the school of origin if there is potential harm to the student.
4. Factors that may be considered are:
 - a. time of day of transportation,
 - b. distance to and from school,
 - c. age of the child or unaccompanied youth,
 - d. medical or other disabilities.
5. Parents and unaccompanied youth must be informed of this right to transportation before they select a school for attendance. Transportation requests from schools should be made to the homeless liaison in a timely manner in order to avoid or minimize delay
6. In addition to receiving transportation to and from the school of origin, children and youth in transition shall also be provided with other transportation services comparable to those offered to all other students.
7. Once a child/family has been identified as being in a "homeless" situation (usually via school faculty/staff, supporting agency notification, etc.), the following steps are taken to secure transportation.
 - a. Contact is made with supporting agency if applicable
 - b. Information on temporary housing location is confirmed
 - c. Parent/Guardian contact information is obtained
 - d. Contact information for shelter, hotel, etc is obtained
 - e. Notification w/above information is sent to transportation company
 - f. Company then sets a route in place as soon as possible. This sometimes take several days depending on where the location is and whether there are any existing routes that new location will fit into.
 - g. Parent/Guardian is notified when transportation will begin and pickup and drop off times are given.
 - h. Contact with the student's school with transportation plan.