

McKINNEY-VENTO (HOMELESS) ENROLLMENT READY REFERENCE FOR SCHOOLS

DEFINITION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The term "homeless children and youth" means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes:

- Children and youth sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in motels, hotels, trailers parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned in hospitals
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Children and youth living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children (as defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because they are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii)

- from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001, Title VII, Subtitle 6, Section 725 as modified by Title X, Part C of NCLB

THE MCKINNEY-VENTO HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT PROMOTES:

- School stability and continuity
- Access to school, classes, and programs
- Academic success
- Child-centered, best-interest decision making

CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS FACE MANY BARRIERS TO EDUCATION, SUCH AS:

- Delayed enrollment
- High numbers of school transfers
- Lack of school supplies and clothing
- Poor health, fatigue, and hunger
- Prejudice and misunderstanding

EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Children and youth experiencing homelessness have the right to:

- Go to school, including public preschool, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there
- Continue in the school of origin (the school attended when permanently housed or the school in which last enrolled) if that is the parent's or youth's choice
- Receive transportation to and from the school of origin
- Enroll in school immediately even if missing records and documents normally required for enrollment
- Enroll and attend classes while the school arranges for the transfer of school and immunization records or any other documents required for enrollment
- Enroll and attend classes in the school of choice (either the school of origin or the school in the attendance zone where the family or youth is residing) even while the school and parent or youth seek to resolve a dispute over the selected school
- Receive the same special programs and services, if needed, as provided to all other students served in these programs
- Receive transportation to and from school and school programs, comparable to that of housed students
- Receive transportation to and from school of origin

ENROLLMENT STRATEGIES:

- ✓ Use enrollment forms that provide a checklist of living situation that may indicate homelessness
- ✓ Use sensitivity and discretion when discussing the family's or youth's living situation; for example, invite the parents or youth to a quiet area away from the traffic of the front office
- ✓ Inform parents and youth of McKinney-Vento rights, especially the right to remain in the school of origin and the right to transportation to and from the school of origin
- ✓ Presume that keeping the homeless child or youth in the school of origin is in the child/youth's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the parent or guardian.
- ✓ Have clothing and school supplies available to provide to students as needed
- ✓ Call, fax, and/or e-mail previous schools, doctors, and health clinics to obtain appropriate records
- ✓ Coordinate with the local liaison and other program administrators to facilitate access to programs, activities, and transportation
- ✓ Arrange free meals

BEST INTEREST:

A child loses 4-6 months of academic progress with every school transfer. Districts are to presume the school of origin is in the student's best interest unless that is contrary to the parent's wishes. District shall also give priority to the wishes of an unaccompanied youth when determining school selection. In determining the best interest of the student these student-centered factors should be considered:

- Age of the child
- Distance of the commute
- Length of stay at the shelter or temporary location
- Need for special instruction
- Time remaining in the school year
- Personal Safety issues

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH:

- An unaccompanied homeless youth is a youth who meets the definition of homeless and also is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian
- Unaccompanied homeless youth can enroll on their own (without a parent)
- Inform the youth of McKinney-Vento rights, including the right remain in the school of origin
- Contact the local liaison for additional information on procedures and policies related to unaccompanied youth

TIPS FOR ORIENTING PARENTS:

- Post the McKinney-Vento rights in a place easily visible to parents
- Avoid using the word "homeless;" emphasize "eligibility for McKinney-Vento services"
- Be welcoming and understanding—many families who have lost their housing are suffering the effects of trauma
- Provide the parents or guardians a tour of the school and let them meet their children's teachers
- Provide parents an orientation to school procedures and policies through a video or handbook
- Help parents compile important information
- Give parents extensive information, perhaps in a brochure or welcome packet, about the local community, such as maps; mass transit schedules; and information on the location of stores, services, laundromats, health clinics, and government offices
- Provide information to parents in their native language

STRATEGIES TO HELP NEW STUDENTS ADJUST AND FEEL WELCOME:

- Recognize that starting a new school can be stressful and intimidating
- Provide the student with an orientation to the school
- Let the student know who to talk to if he or she is having difficulty; let him or her know the school is there for help and support
- Provide the student a faculty and peer mentor/buddy
- Give the student a small welcome gift that shows the school colors and/or team name
- Inform the student of school programs and extracurricular activities that align with his or her interests

School is a place of normalcy, safety, support, and hope for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

STRATEGIES FOR PLACING STUDENTS IN CLASSES BEFORE RECORDS ARE OBTAINED

- While waiting for official records, talk with previous teachers, school counselors, and others for informal assistance with placement decisions
- Use or develop short, easily administered educational assessments to place students immediately
- Access any standardized testing or other achievement data available from the state or local database systems
- Gather available information from students and parents

NATIONAL PARTNERS IN HOMELESS EDUCATION

- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) www.naehcy.org
- National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) www.serve.org/nche
- National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) www.nlchp.org
- Schoolhouse Connection <http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/>

The National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE) is the U.S. Department of Education's technical assistance center that assists schools and communities in helping children in homeless situations enroll and succeed in school.

Have Questions? Need Posters or Parent Packs? Call the Helpline: 800-308-2145 Email: homeless@serve.org

Need further information? Visit the Website: www.serve.org/nche