

Homeless Students: Enrollment Rights and Services

Purpose

This procedure guides school staff in the identification, enrollment and provision of instructional and ancillary services for homeless children and youths.

Scope

This procedure informs school administrators, staff, parents or guardians and students.

Procedure

1. DEFINITIONS

- 1.1. “Homeless children and youths” means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes children and youth who:
 - (a) Are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
 - (b) Are living in motels, parks, or campgrounds.
 - (c) Have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a sleeping accommodation by human beings.
 - (d) Are living in cars, abandoned buildings, substandard housing or similar situations.
 - (e) Are migratory and living in circumstances like those described above.
- 1.2. Cities, counties and states have varying housing codes that define housing deemed substandard by law. "Substandard housing" may be determined by considering factors such as whether the setting in which the child or youth is living:
 - (f) Lacks water, electricity, or heat.
 - (g) Is infested with vermin or mold.
 - (h) Lacks a working kitchen or toilet.
 - (i) Presents unreasonable dangers to adults, children, or persons with disabilities.
- 1.3. “Unaccompanied youth” means a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian and includes youth living on their own in any of the homeless situations described in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act.
- 1.4. “School of origin” means the school or preschool that a child or youth attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled. When a child or youth completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the school of origin includes the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

- 1.5. “Best interest determination” means that the district must make school placement decisions for homeless students and youths on the basis of their best interest, as determined by student-centered factors including impact of mobility on achievement, education, health and safety. Priority should be given to the request of the child or the parent/guardian or unaccompanied youth. Placement of siblings should also be considered.
- 1.6. “Excess cost of transportation” means the difference between what the district normally spends to transport a student to school and the cost of transporting a homeless student to school. For example, there is no excess cost of transportation if the district provides transportation to a homeless student by a regular bus route. However, if the district provides special transportation to a homeless student (for example, by private vehicle or transportation company), the entire cost would be considered excess costs of transportation. The additional cost of the district's re-routing of busses to transport a homeless student can be considered excess cost of transportation. The district may use McKinney-Vento subgrant funds and Title I, Part A funds to defray excess cost of transportation for homeless students.

2. IDENTIFICATION

- 2.1. Special attention will be given to ensuring the identification of homeless children and youths. To that end, the district will:
 - (a) Use a housing questionnaire in its enrollment process. The questionnaire will be distributed universally so as to avoid stigmatizing homeless children and youths and their families.
 - (b) Ensure that referral forms used to identify and support homeless students are accessible and easy to use.
 - (c) Include its homeless liaison's contact information on its website, and inform school personnel, service providers and advocates working with homeless families of the duties of the district homeless liaison.
 - (d) Provide materials for homeless students and parents, if necessary and to the extent feasible, in their native language.
 - (e) As practicable, provide annual guidance for school staff on the definition of homelessness, signs of homelessness, the impact of homelessness on students and steps to take when a potentially homeless student is identified, including how to connect the student with appropriate housing and support service providers.
 - (f) Develop interagency partnerships to serve homeless families and youths.
 - (g) Work with the state homelessness coordinator to facilitate services to families and youths made homeless by natural disasters or other catastrophic events.

3. LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1. The designated district homeless liaison should attend training to develop the skills necessary to help staff be aware of the indicators of possible homelessness and identify homeless children or youth. The liaison will work to improve local systems to identify homeless students.
 - 3.1.1. The liaison will facilitate staff training and viewing of the OSPI video, *Identification of Homeless Students: An Overview for School District Staff*.
 - 3.1.2. Identification practices may include the use of the housing questionnaire (3115F1), a Notification of Student Needs form (3115F3), a Student Intake form (3115F2), or similar documents to collect student information.
- 3.2. The liaison should, in coordination with school administrators and staff, ensure homeless students are enrolled and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in school.
 - 3.2.1. The liaison will assist parents, guardians and unaccompanied youth in obtaining immunizations, health screenings, guardianship records and other documents normally required for enrollment.
 - 3.2.2. The liaison will work to identify and remove barriers that prevent homeless students from receiving credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school.
- 3.3. The liaison will ensure homeless children and families receive the educational services for which they are eligible, including Head Start and Even Start or similar programs, and preschool programs administered by the district. Liaison assistance will include providing family referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services (Form 3115F7).
 - 3.3.1. The liaison will inform parents or guardians of a homeless student of transportation service options, including transportation to the school of origin, and assist the family with accessing transportation to the school selected.
 - 3.3.2. The liaison will coordinate with the district's nutrition services staff to ensure that homeless students are identified and provided proper access to free school meals, and that applicable accountability and reporting requirements are satisfied.
- 3.4. The liaison will ensure parents or guardians of homeless children and youths are informed of the educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
- 3.5. The liaison will collaborate with local community agencies and ensure public notice of the educational rights available to homeless students is disseminated in local places where such children and youth receive services (for example, schools,

shelters, and food banks). The liaison will use Form #3115F8-McKinney-Vento Family Information Flyer or similar document for public notice.

- 3.6. The liaison will ensure unaccompanied youths enrolled in school have opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic standards as the state establishes for other children and youths. This assistance will include:
 - (a) Information regarding their status as independent students under section 480 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) (20 U.S.C. 1087vv) for federal student aid purposes, and their right to receive verification of this status from the local liaison.
 - (b) Connections with needed supports such as housing assistance, health care and other services.
- 3.7. In accordance with training received from the state, the liaison will affirm whether homeless students meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness to qualify them for HUD homeless assistance programs and refer homeless families and students to housing and other services.
- 3.8. Should a dispute arise concerning placement of the student, the liaison will carry out the dispute resolution process and provide parents or unaccompanied youth with appropriate information and/or forms (3115F4).

4. PLACEMENT AND ENROLLMENT

- 4.1. When deciding placement, the district will presume that allowing the homeless student to remain in their school of origin is in the student's best interest, except when doing so is contrary to the request of the student's parent or guardian or unaccompanied youth.
 - 4.1.1. If the parent/guardian contests the district's decision, the district will make a best interest determination based on factors such as the impact of mobility on the student's educational achievement, health and safety. If the best interest determination is requested by an unaccompanied youth, the process will give priority to the views of the youth.
 - 4.1.2. After conducting a best interest determination, the district will provide to the parent or guardian of the student in a timely manner and in a language they can understand, a written explanation of the final decision and notification of the right to appeal the decision, and right to enroll in the school of choice pending the appeal process. (Refer to section 5)
- 4.2. The district will avoid delay or denial of enrollment of homeless students, even if they have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness or are unable to produce records required for enrollment (for example, previous academic records, immunization records, health records, proof of residency, proof of guardianship, birth certificates).

- 4.2.1. Pending resolution of disputes that arise over eligibility, school selection or enrollment, the district will immediately enroll a homeless student in the school in which the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth seeks enrollment.
- 4.2.2. The district will immediately contact the school last attended by the homeless student to obtain relevant academic and other records.
- 4.2.3. The district will avoid requirements for student contact information to be in a form or manner that creates a barrier for homeless students.
- 4.3. The district will provide transportation for homeless students to their school or preschool of origin. Once the student has obtained permanent housing, the district will continue to provide such transportation until the end of the academic year.
 - 4.3.1. If the homeless student remains in their school of origin but begins living in an area served by the district, the district of origin and the district in which the homeless student is living must agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for the student's transportation to and from their school of origin. If the districts cannot reach agreement, the responsibility and costs for transportation will be shared equally.
 - 4.3.2. The district will also continue to provide transportation to the student's school of origin pending the outcome of any enrollment or transportation disputes.

5. DISPUTES

- 5.1. The district liaison will follow the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) McKinney-Vento Dispute Resolution Process as expeditiously as possible after receiving the notice of a dispute concerning school placement. The school placement dispute resolution process follows these general steps:
 - Level I: Written appeal to the school principal and liaison
 - Level II: Appeal to the district Superintendent and conference
 - Level III: Appeal to the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)/Homeless Education Coordinator
- 5.2. The liaison will explain the initial school placement decision to the parents in writing and inform them of their right to appeal the decision. The liaison is encouraged to attempt to resolve disagreements at the local level and/or seek informal support from OSPI early upon the first indication of disagreement.
 - 5.2.1. A Dispute Resolution Packet (3115F4) with information about the resolution process will be provided to the parents, in a language they can understand.

5.2.2. The School Placement Dispute Resolution form must be returned by the parents or unaccompanied youth to the school and/or liaison within fifteen (15) business days of notification of placement.

5.3. If the parent or unaccompanied youth disagrees with the school decision, further appeals will be made to the district Superintendent. The parents of the child, or the unaccompanied youth, will be provided with a written explanation of the appealed decision regarding school selection or enrollment, including the rights of the parents or child to appeal the decision to OSPI as provided in the state's dispute resolution process.

6. OTHER SERVICES

6.1. Free Meals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that all homeless children are automatically eligible for free meals. Parents do not have to complete an Application for Free or Reduced-Price Meals. The district liaison will verify and document student names and effective dates. The student remains eligible for free meals for the duration of the school year, even if the student moves to permanent housing.

Supporting Documentation

3115F1-Student Housing Questionnaire

3115F2-Student Intake Form

3115F3-Notification of Student Needs

3115F4-Parent-Student Dispute Resolution Packet

3115F5-Transportation Request

3115F6-Caregiver Authorization

3115F7-Referral for Community Services

3115F8-McKinney-Vento Family Information Flyer

Washington State McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program School Staff Resource, OSPI, June 2016 (<http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/School-Staff-Resource.pdf>)

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction [Dispute Resolution Process](#)

[Identification of Homeless Students: An Overview for School District Staff](#)

(<http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/video/IdentificationofChildrendandYouthsExperiencingHomelessness.mp4>)

[Homeless with Homework: Introduction to Homeless Education](#)

(<http://servepres1.serve.org/hwh/>)

[National Center for Homeless Education](#) (NCHE) website

(<http://center.serve.org/nche/index.php>); [Self-Paced Online Training](#) resources

Document History

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