

Homeless Children and Youth Policy

I. Definitions.

A. Homeless Children and Youth. Homeless children and youth are defined as children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This term includes children and youth who are:

- sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up);
- living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
- living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- abandoned in hospitals;
- awaiting foster care placement, until December 10, 2016;
- 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 who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;
- migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above; or
- children displaced from their housing during naturally occurring disasters. When children and their families are displaced from their housing as a result of a natural disaster, there is often a period of instability in which various private organizations and local, State, and Federal agencies provide assistance. The School should determine such children's eligibility for McKinney-Vento services on a case-by-case basis. In making this determination, they should take into consideration the services that are available through these other sources.

When determining if the setting in which the family, child, or youth is lives is "substandard housing," the School may consider whether the setting is substandard due to a lack of fundamental utilities such as water, electricity, or heat; infestation with vermin, pests or mold; lack of basic functional parts of a home, such as a working kitchen, working toilet, or working shower; or, the presence of unreasonable dangers to adults, children, or persons with disabilities.

If a child or youth's living situation does not clearly fall into the situations described above, the School should consider the relative permanence of the living arrangements.

Determinations of homelessness should be made on a case-by-case basis. Incarcerated children and youth and children and youth in foster care are not considered homeless.

- B. Unaccompanied Youth. The term “unaccompanied youth” includes a homeless child or youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. This would include youth living in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, cars, on the streets, or in other inadequate housing, children and youth denied housing by their families, and school-age unwed mothers living in homes for unwed mothers who have no other housing available.
- C. School of Origin. The school of origin is the school that the child or youth attended when permanently housed, or, the school in which the child or youth was last enrolled, including a preschool. When a child or youth completes the final grade level served by the school of origin, the term “school of origin” will include the designated receiving school at the next grade level for all feeder schools.

II. School Liaisons for Homeless Children.

The School liaison serves as one of the primary contacts between homeless families and Staff, shelter workers, and other service providers. The liaison coordinates services to ensure that homeless children and youth enroll in school and have the opportunity to succeed academically.

School liaisons help to ensure that:

- Homeless children and youth are identified by school personnel and through outreach and coordination activities with other entities and agencies;
- Homeless students are enrolled in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, the School;
- Homeless children, youth, and their families have access to and receive educational services for which they are eligible, including services through Head Start programs, early intervention services under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and preschool programs administered by the School;
- Homeless children, youth, and their families receive referrals to health, mental health and substance abuse, dental, housing, and other appropriate services;
- Parents or guardians of homeless children and youth are informed of educational and related opportunities available to their children and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;
- Parents or guardians of homeless children and youth, and unaccompanied youth, are fully informed of all transportation services, including transportation to and from the school of origin, and are assisted in accessing transportation services;

- Enrollment disputes are mediated in accordance with the requirements of this policy and the McKinney-Vento Act;
- Public notice of the educational rights of homeless students is disseminated to locations frequented by parents or guardians of homeless children and youth, and unaccompanied youth, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to them;
- Immunizations or medical records are obtained;
- Staff is trained on the requirements regarding immediate enrollment and receive professional development and other support;
- Unaccompanied youth are enrolled in school, have opportunities to meet the same challenging State academic standards as are established for other children and youth, including through implementation of this Policy, and are informed of their status as independent students and that they may obtain assistance from the liaison to receive verification of that status for purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA);
- Policies are reviewed to ensure that they comply with this Policy;
- Affidavits of residence or other forms replace typical proof of residency without creating barriers or delaying enrollment;
- School-based immunization or other opportunities for on-site immunizations are arranged;
- Community-based or public agencies are contacted who may provide school uniforms;
- School records are accepted directly from families and youth;
- Previous schools are contacted for records and assistance with placement decisions;
- Short-term educational assessments place students immediately while awaiting complete academic records;
- Families and youth are communicated with in a language they understand or in an accessible format, as appropriate, of their right to attend either their school of origin or local school;
- Staff places homeless children and youth and identifies and serve disabilities in accordance with the IDEA;
- The School works with State Coordinators for the Department of Education concerning the provision of education and related support services to homeless children and youth, including collecting and providing reliable, valid, and comprehensive data;

- Understandable forms are written and accessible explaining decisions and rights to appeal; and
- Follow-up is timely concerning special education, language assistance, referrals, and services.

School liaisons may be able to identify preschool-aged homeless children by working closely with shelters and social service agencies in their area. In addition, the liaison should work with school personnel, who can inquire, at the time they are enrolling homeless children and youth in school, whether the family has preschool-aged children.

III. School Placement and Enrollment.

The School shall make school placement determinations on the basis of the “best interest” of the homeless child or youth and shall:

- Continue the child’s or youth’s education in the school of origin for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; and for the remainder of the academic year if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or
- Enroll the child or youth in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend.
- In determining a child’s or youth’s best interest, the School must presume that keeping a homeless child or youth in the “school of origin” is in the child’s or youth’s best interest, unless doing so is contrary to the request of the youth’s parent or guardian, or the unaccompanied youth. The School must consider student-centered factors related to the child’s or youth’s best interest, including factors related to the impact of mobility on achievement, education, health, and safety of homeless children and youth, giving priority to the request of the parent or guardian or the unaccompanied youth. The School should also consider the placement of siblings when determining the best interest of the child.
- In the case of an unaccompanied youth, the School must ensure that the school homeless liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions, gives priority to the views of the youth, and provides notice to the youth of the right to appeal the placement decision.
- If the School determines that it is not in the child’s or youth’s best interest to attend the school of origin or a school requested by the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, the School must provide a written explanation of the reasons for its determination to the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth, together with information regarding the right to appeal the placement decision.

If a School is selected on the basis of a “best interest determination,” it must immediately enroll the homeless child or youth, even if the child or youth is unable to produce the records normally required for enrollment (such as previous academic records, records of immunization and other required health records, proof of residency, birth certificates, or other documentation), has missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness, or is subject to outstanding fees or fines, or excessive absences. The School must immediately contact the school last attended by the child or youth to obtain relevant academic or other records. If a child or youth needs to obtain immunizations or other required health records, the School must immediately refer the parent or guardian, or the unaccompanied youth, to the school homeless liaison, who must assist in obtaining the immunizations, screenings, or records. The records must be maintained so that they are available in a timely fashion when the child enters a new school or school district.

IV. Placement Disputes between a School and a Parent.

If a dispute arises over eligibility, or school selection or enrollment, the School must immediately enroll the homeless student in the school in which enrollment is sought by the parent or guardian, pending resolution of the dispute, including all available appeals. Similar provisions apply to placement of unaccompanied youth.

The School must provide the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth with a written explanation of any decisions related to school selection or enrollment made by the school or the Ohio Department of Education and the appeal rights. The School must refer the unaccompanied youth, parent, or guardian to the school homeless liaison, who must expeditiously carry out the dispute resolution process.

The School should consider the following strategies for effectively resolving school enrollment disputes:

1. Disputes should be resolved at the administrative, if possible;
2. If other Schools are involved, representatives from all involved schools and the State should be present to resolve the dispute;
3. A State-level appeal process, involving the State coordinator, should be available for appeals and resolution of inter-district disputes;
4. The dispute resolution process should be as informal and accessible as possible, and allow for impartial and complete review;
5. Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth should be able to initiate the dispute resolution process directly at the school they choose, as well as with the homeless liaison’s office;
6. Parents, guardians, and unaccompanied youth should be informed that they can provide written or oral documentation to support their position;

7. Students should be provided with all services for which they are eligible while disputes are resolved;
8. Written notice should be complete, as brief as possible, simply stated, and provided in a language the parent, guardian, or unaccompanied youth can understand. The notice should include:
 - a. Contact information for the School homeless liaison and State coordinator, with a brief description of their roles;
 - b. A simple, detachable form that parents, guardians, or unaccompanied youth can complete and turn in to the school to initiate the dispute process. (The School should copy the form and return the copy to the parent, guardian or youth for their records when it is submitted);
 - c. A step-by-step description of how to dispute the School's decision;
 - d. Notice of the right to enroll immediately in the school of choice pending resolution of the dispute;
 - e. Notice that "immediate enrollment" includes full participation in all school activities;
 - f. Notice of the right to appeal to the State if the School-level resolution is not satisfactory; and
 - g. Timelines for resolving School- and State-level appeals.

V. Prohibition against Segregation.

Homelessness is not sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment. Services provided with McKinney-Vento Act funds must not replace the regular academic program and must be designed to expand upon or improve services provided as part of the School's regular academic program.

- If a State receives funds under the McKinney-Vento program, every district in that State – whether or not it receives a McKinney-Vento subgrant from the State – is prohibited from segregating homeless students in separate schools or in separate programs within schools, based on the child's or youth's status as homeless.
- Schools may not provide services with McKinney-Vento funds on school grounds in settings that segregate homeless children and youth from other children and youth [except as necessary for short periods of time for health and safety emergencies or to provide temporary, special, and supplementary services to meet the unique needs of homeless children and youth].

VI. Transportation.

At the request of the parent or guardian (or, in the case of an unaccompanied youth, the liaison), transportation shall be provided to or from the “school of origin” in accordance with the following requirements:

- If the homeless child or youth continues to live in the area in which the school of origin is located, that School must provide or arrange for the child’s or youth’s transportation to or from the school of origin.
- If the homeless child or youth continues his or her education in the school of origin but begins living in an area served by another local educational agency (LEA), the LEA of origin and the LEA in which the homeless child or youth is living must agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the LEAs cannot agree upon a method, the responsibility and costs for transportation are to be shared equally.

VII. Comparable and Coordinated Services.

The School must provide services to each homeless child and youth that is comparable to services offered to other students in the School. Homeless children are also entitled to participate in the regular after-school program provided by the School, and the School must address barriers to their full participation in these programs. If no after-school programs are provided by the school or the programs provided do not meet the needs of homeless children, McKinney-Vento funds may be used for after-school services for homeless children, and for non-homeless children who are at risk of failing in, or dropping out of, school.

The School must provide comparable services to a homeless student who does not attend a Title I school. School must reserve funds for homeless children who do not attend participating Title I schools and may, for instance, provide support services to children in shelters and other locations where homeless children live. Services should be provided to assist homeless students to effectively take advantage of educational opportunities.

VIII. Privacy.

Information about a homeless child’s or youth’s living situation shall be treated as a student education record, and shall not be deemed to be directory information.

42 U.S.C. 11431, et seq.; 20 U.S.C. 6363(c)(3); 42 U.S.C. 11432(g)(1)(J)(iii)