



Practical Application of the McKinney-Vento Act

Is a young person in your program having trouble enrolling in school? According to federal law, children who have lost their housing have the right to attend school, no matter where they live or how long they have lived there.

Protecting the Right of Homeless Youth to Go to School

The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that ensures the right of students to go to school even when they are homeless or don't have a permanent address. The Act aims to reduce barriers that have prevented many homeless youth from enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, including:

- transportation;
- residency requirements; and
- documentation requirements, such as birth certificates and medical records.

Who can get help under McKinney-Vento?

All homeless young people—including “unaccompanied youth” not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian—who are:

- living in emergency shelters or transitional living programs;
- staying temporarily with friends or relatives due to inadequate housing; or
- staying in motels, campgrounds, cars, or other temporary housing.

What school can they go to?

Youth have the right to attend either:

- the school nearest to where they are living; or
- the school where they were last enrolled (called “school of origin”), even if they move out of the school district.

When youth choose to go to the school in the area where they are living, the school must immediately let students enroll, attend classes, and participate fully in school activities, even if students do not have a parent or guardian with them or documents typically required for enrollment, such as birth certificates, proof of residency, medical records, and school records.

How do they get there?

The district in which the student chooses to attend school must provide or arrange transportation.

Tips for working with young people

- Inform young people upon intake about their rights to an education and how they can access educational services, including their right to appeal school enrollment decisions. Have written information about the laws available.
- Decide how to introduce young people to the school and how to best represent their interests in the educational planning process. Listen to what young people say they want and need in school to be successful.
- Be aware of alternative school options for youth in your area, such as vocational education, credit-for-work programs, and flexible school hours.
- Help young people obtain necessary school records, health records, and other documentation. Although the McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to enroll students without these documents, obtaining them as quickly as possible will help facilitate a smooth transition to school. When necessary, help arrange appointments for physicals and immunizations.
- Tour the local schools and meet school staff, including administrators, secretaries, school counselors, bus drivers, security guards, and others. Talk to young people about the local school and prepare them to arrive.



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Working with School Districts and Schools

McKinney-Vento requires every school district to have a homeless education liaison who works with young people, schools, and service providers to make sure that homeless youth have a smooth transition into school and receive the support services for academic achievement they are guaranteed under law.

How do I find out who my local liaison is?

Contact your state coordinator for homeless education. A list of state coordinators can be found online.

What do I do if the school refuses to take a student?

If you feel a school may not have followed the McKinney-Vento Act's requirements, call the homeless education liaison at your local educational agency or the state coordinator for homeless education.

Tips for working with school districts and schools

- Introduce your agency and the services you provide to the local liaison and school staff, and work on building a strong collaborative relationship with them. Establish your agency as a resource, so they will feel comfortable referring youth to your agency for assistance.
- Homeless youth are automatically eligible for Title I services, such as free lunch programs. Work with the local liaison to make sure young people receive needed and available services.
- Become familiar with your school district's policies about enrolling unaccompanied youth. Some districts allow youth to enroll themselves while others permit service agency personnel or the local liaison to sign for them.
- Work with local liaisons to encourage schools to permit flexible exceptions on a case-by-case basis to school policies on class schedules, tardiness, and credits to accommodate students' needs.
- Offer to assist with school district professional development activities on homelessness, provide training on how to recognize school absences that may be the result of homelessness, and talk with school personnel about the causes and effects of homelessness and ways the school can support students who are homeless.

Where do I go if I have more questions?

National Center for Homeless Education <http://center.serve.org/nche/>

State coordinators: a list of state coordinators for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is available at <http://www.serve.org/nche/downloads/sccontact.pdf>

Videos: available at http://www.serve.org/nche/web/s_p.php

These videos give brief introductions to key issues covered in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Most presentations offer a downloadable summary of main points and certificate of completion, upon completing a brief quiz on the material presented. The quiz and certificate of completion are optional.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Available at <http://naehcy.org/dl/faq.pdf>

This document was compiled by the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth and provides answers to the most frequently asked questions on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.