

HOMELESS STUDENTS: ENROLLMENT RIGHTS AND SERVICES

I. Preamble.

A. As required by law, the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) will work with homeless children as well as their families or legal guardian(s) to provide stability in school attendance and other services. Special attention will be given to ensuring the enrollment and attendance of homeless students not attending school.

B. This policy is intended to cover two types of homeless students:

(i) enrolled PSB students who become homeless and are temporarily housed outside of Brookline;

(ii) homeless students temporarily housed within Brookline.

II. Definitions.

A. Homeless students are defined as students lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including:

1. Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason;

2. Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;

3. Living in emergency or transitional shelters;

4. Being abandoned in hospitals;

5. Living in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations for people;

6. Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, transportation stations or other similar settings;

7. Living in temporary housing provided by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance or other government agencies or charity organizations;

8. Migratory children living in conditions described in the previous examples.

III. Services.

A. Homeless students will be provided district services for which other PSB students are generally eligible, including pre-school programs, Title I, special education, and bilingual education. Homeless students will be eligible for vocational and technical education, gifted and talented programs, wraparound service programs, school nutrition programs, summer programs, after school programs, athletics programs, music, visual arts and performing arts programs, and other extracurricular activities.

B. The Superintendent shall designate an appropriate staff person to be the district's liaison for homeless students and their families. The PSB liaison for homeless students and their families shall coordinate with local social service agencies that provide services to homeless children and youths and their families; other school districts on issues of transportation and records transfers; and state and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies. This coordination includes providing public notice of the educational rights of homeless students. The district's liaison will also review and recommend amendments to district policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless students. The liaison shall ensure district staff receive professional development and other support on issues involving homeless students.

IV. Students Remaining in Schools of Origin.

A. It is presumed to be in the best interest of homeless students to remain in their schools of origin, i.e. the school that the student was attending at the time homelessness commenced, or the last school the student attended prior to becoming homeless.

B. Homeless students may continue to attend their school of origin for as long as they remain homeless in Brookline, or until the end of their school of origin's current academic reporting period (e.g. quarter, trimester, semester, etc.) except that:

(i) homeless students in the final grade level at a school in the PSB may remain within the PSB until the end of the school year during which they move out of Brookline;

(ii) enrolled PSB students who subsequently become homeless inside or outside of Brookline may continue within the PSB for the duration of any school year.

C. For homeless students who completed or complete the final grade level served by the school of origin, and remain homeless in Brookline or were enrolled in the PSB at the time they became homeless, the term "school of origin" shall also include the receiving school in the same school district educating students at the next grade level.

D. Homeless students are entitled to transportation comparable to that provided for all other students attending school in the district. The PSB will transport students who are sheltered or temporarily residing within Brookline to the students' school of origin. For homeless students residing outside of Brookline for whom the school of origin is within Brookline, the PSB will coordinate with the district in which the student is sheltered or temporarily residing to provide the transportation services necessary for the student.

V. Students Enrolling in District Where Sheltered or Temporarily Residing.

A. Parent(s) or legal guardian(s) may elect to enroll homeless students in the school district in which the student is sheltered or temporarily residing, rather than having the student remain in the school of origin. Enrollment changes for homeless students should take place within one calendar week.

B. If homeless students are unable to provide written proof of their shelter or temporary residence, the homeless liaison will work with the family seeking enrollment to determine homelessness.

VI. Records.

A. Information regarding a homeless student's living arrangements shall not be considered directory information. Records containing information about the homeless student's living arrangements may not be disclosed without the consent of the parent or legal guardian, absent a state or federal student-privacy related exemption.

B. If the student cannot provide immediate access to immunization records, the student shall be permitted to enroll under a personal exception. Students and families should be encouraged to obtain current immunization records or immunizations as soon as possible.

VII. Contact Information.

A. Emergency contact information is required at the time of enrollment consistent with PSB policies, including compliance with the state's address confidentiality program where necessary.

B. After enrollment, the PSB will immediately request available records from any school(s) attended by the homeless student within the last two calendar years.

VIII. Dispute Resolution.

A. If the PSB disagrees with a parent or legal guardian's determination of a homeless student's best interests for school district placement, the PSB will explain to the parent(s) or legal guardian(s), in writing and in a language the parent can understand, the rationale for its determination and provide the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) with written notice of their rights to appeal the PSB's determination to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

B. During the pendency of an appeal to DESE, the student shall remain enrolled at whichever school the student attended during the filing of the appeal. Pending appeal, the student shall receive transportation to that school.

C. If an out of district school of origin refuses to keep a student during the pendency of a parent or legal guardian's appeal, the PSB shall enroll that student in the PSB, provided that the student qualifies as homeless and temporarily resides in Brookline.