



Overview of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

National Association for the Education of Homeless
Children and Youth

www.naehcy.org

National Center for Homeless Education

www.serve.org/nche



How many children and youth experience homelessness?

- 1.35 million children
- 10% of all children living in poverty
- 733,000-1.3 million youths
- Over 40% of all children who are homeless are under the age of 5





Causes of Homelessness

- Lack of affordable housing
- Deep poverty
- Health problems
- Domestic violence
- Natural and other disasters
- Abuse/neglect (unaccompanied youth)





Barriers to Education for Homeless Children and Youth

- Enrollment requirements (school records, immunizations, proof of residence and guardianship)
- High mobility resulting in lack of school stability and educational continuity
- Lack of access to programs
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of school supplies, clothing, etc.
- Poor health, fatigue, hunger
- Prejudice and misunderstanding



McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

- Reauthorized 2002 by NCLB
- Main themes:
 - School stability
 - School access
 - Support for academic success
 - Child-centered, best interest decision making



Eligibility—Who is Covered?

- Children who **lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**—
 - Sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason
 - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds due to lack of adequate alternative accommodations
 - Living in emergency or transitional shelters
 - Abandoned in hospitals





Eligibility— Who is Covered? (cont.)

- Awaiting foster care placement
- Living in a public or private place not designed for humans to live
- Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, etc.
- Migratory children living in above circumstances





Local Homeless Education Liaisons

- Every LEA must designate a liaison for students in homeless situations
- Responsibilities
 - Ensure that children and youth in homeless situations are identified
 - Ensure that homeless students enroll in and have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school
 - Link with educational services, including preschool and health services



Local Homeless Education Liaisons (cont.)

- Inform parents, guardians, or youth of educational and parent involvement opportunities
- Post public notice of educational rights
- Resolve disputes
- Inform parents, guardians, or youth of transportation services, including to the school of origin





Identification Strategies

- Provide awareness activities for school staff (registrars, secretaries, counselors, social workers, nurses, teachers, bus drivers, administrators, etc.)
- Coordinate with community service agencies, such as shelters, soup kitchens, drop-in centers, welfare and housing agencies, and public health departments
- Provide outreach materials and posters where there is a frequent influx of low-income families and youth in high-risk situations, including motels and campgrounds
- Educate school staff about “warning signs” that may indicate an enrolled child or youth may be experiencing homelessness



Identification Strategies (cont.)

- Make special efforts to identify preschool children, including asking about the siblings of school-aged children
- Develop relationships with truancy officials and/or other attendance officers
- Use enrollment and withdrawal forms to inquire about living situations
- Have students draw or write about where they live.
- Avoid using the word "homeless" in initial contacts with school personnel, families, or youth



School Stability— Key Provisions

- Children and youth experiencing homelessness can stay in their school of origin or enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend, according to their best interest
- School of origin—school attended when permanently housed or in which last enrolled
- Best interest—keep homeless students in their schools of origin, to the extent feasible, unless this is against the parents' or guardians' wishes



Feasibility— USDE Sample Criteria

- Continuity of instruction
- Age of the child or youth
- Safety of the child or youth
- Length of stay at the shelter
- Likely area where family will find permanent housing
- Student's need for special instructional programs
- Impact of commute on education
- School placement of siblings
- Time remaining in the school year



School Selection— Key Provisions

- Students can stay in their school of origin the entire time they are homeless, and until the end of any academic year in which they move into permanent housing
- If a student becomes homeless in between academic years, he or she may continue in the school of origin for the following academic year
- If a student is sent to a school other than that requested by a parent or guardian, the district must provide a written explanation to the parent or guardian of its decision and the right to appeal



Research on School Mobility

- Students who switch schools frequently score lower on standardized tests; study found mobile students scored 20 points lower than non-mobile students
- Mobility also hurts non-mobile students; study found average test scores for non-mobile students were significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates
- It takes children an average of 4-6 months to recover academically after changing schools

Research on School Mobility (cont.)



- Students suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility; mobile students are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and more likely to act out or get into trouble
- Mobility during high school greatly diminishes the likelihood of graduation; study found students who changed high schools even once were less than half as likely as stable students to graduate, even controlling for other factors



Transportation—Key Provisions

- LEAs must provide students experiencing homelessness with transportation to and from their school of origin, at a parent's or guardian's request (or at the liaisons request for unaccompanied youth)
- If the student's temporary residence and the school of origin are in the same LEA, that LEA must provide or arrange transportation; if the student is living outside of the school of origin's LEA, the LEA where the student is living and the school of origin's LEA must determine how to divide the responsibility and share the cost, or they must share the cost equally

Transportation— Key Provisions (cont.)

- In addition to providing transportation to the school of origin, LEAs must provide students in homeless situations with transportation services comparable to those provided to other students
- School districts must eliminate barriers to the school enrollment and retention of students experiencing homelessness (including transportation barriers)





Transportation Strategies

- Develop close ties among local liaisons, school staff, pupil transportation staff, and shelter workers
- Re-route school buses (including special education, magnet school and other buses)
- Develop formal or informal agreements with school districts where homeless children cross district lines
- Provide passes for public transportation
- Use approved van or taxi services
- Reimburse parents for gas





Enrollment—Key Provisions

- Children and youth in homeless situations can stay in their school of origin (to the extent feasible) or enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend
- The terms “enroll” and “enrollment” include attending classes and participating fully in school activities

Enrollment— Key Provisions (cont.)

- Children and youth have the right to enroll in school immediately, even if they do not have required documents, such as school records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documents
- If a student does not have immunizations, or immunization or medical records, the liaison must immediately assist in obtaining them, and the student must be enrolled in the interim





Enrollment— Key Provisions (cont.)

- Enrolling schools must obtain school records from the previous school, and students must be enrolled in school while records are obtained
- Schools must maintain records for students who are homeless so they are available quickly
- Federal law supercedes state and local laws where there is a conflict [U.S. Constitution, Article VI]
- SEAs and LEAs must develop, review, and revise policies to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of children and youth in homeless situations



Resolution of Disputes— Key Provisions

- Every state must establish dispute resolution procedures
- When a dispute over enrollment arises, the student must be admitted immediately to the school of choice while the dispute is being resolved
- Liaisons must ensure unaccompanied youth are enrolled immediately while the dispute is being resolved



Resolution of Disputes— Key Provisions (cont.)

- Whenever a dispute arises, the parent or guardian must be provided with a written explanation of the school's decision, including the right to appeal
- The school must refer the child, youth, parent, or guardian to the liaison to carry out the dispute resolution process as expeditiously as possible
- Documentation should be kept for all local liaison interventions with parents—not just formal disputes (NCLB)



Homeless Unaccompanied Youth—Key Provisions

- Definition: youth who meets the definition of homeless and is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian
- Liaisons must help unaccompanied youth choose and enroll in a school, after considering the youth's wishes, and inform the youth of his or her appeal rights
- School personnel must be made aware of the specific needs of runaway and homeless youth.





Unaccompanied Youth— Strategies

- Revise LEA policies to accommodate unaccompanied youth and comply with the McKinney-Vento Act
- Train local liaisons and all school enrollment staff, secretaries, guidance counselors, principals, and teachers on the definition, rights, and needs of unaccompanied youth
- Develop caretaker forms, self-enrollment forms for unaccompanied youth, and other forms to replace typical proof of guardianship; such forms should be crafted carefully so they do not create further barriers or delay enrollment
- Become familiar with state and local policies related to unaccompanied youth



Unaccompanied Youth— Strategies (cont.)

- Coordinate with other agencies to ensure policies do not create educational barriers
- Provide unaccompanied youth the opportunity to enroll in diversified learning opportunities, such as vocational education, credit-for-work programs, and flexible school hours
- Provide a “safe place” and trained mentor at school for unaccompanied youth to access as needed
- Permit exceptions to school policies on class schedules, tardiness, absences and credits to accommodate the needs of unaccompanied youth
- Assist with credit accrual and recovery



Preschool-Aged Children

- Liaisons must ensure that families and children have access to Head Start, Even Start, and other public preschool programs administered by the LEA
- State plans must describe procedures that ensure that homeless children have access to public preschool programs
- U.S. HHS issued a memo in 1992 describing how Head Start grantees should collaborate and adjust their programs to serve homeless children; this memo remains in effect
- Pending changes to the Head Start Act



Preschool—Strategies

- Keep slots open for homeless students
- Provide awareness training for preschool providers
- Collaborate with preschools not operated by the LEA or SEA (including Head Start)
- Ask parents about preschool-aged children when they enroll their school-aged children in school
- Coordinate with IDEA Child Find





Access to Services

- Students who experience homelessness must have access to educational services for which they are eligible, including special education, programs for English learners, gifted and talented programs, voc./tech. programs, and school nutrition programs
- Undocumented children and youth have the same right to attend public school as U.S. citizens and are covered by the McKinney-Vento Act to the same extent as other children and youth (*Plyler v. Doe*)



Access to Services (cont.)

- USDA policy permits liaisons and shelter directors to obtain free school meals for students by providing a list of names of students experiencing homelessness with effective dates
- The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA includes amendments that reinforce timely assessment, inclusion, and continuity of services for homeless children and youth who have disabilities

Segregation



- States are prohibited from segregating homeless students in separate schools, separate programs within schools, or separate settings within schools
- SEAs and LEAs must adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children and youth are not segregated or stigmatized on the basis of their status as homeless
- Services provided with McKinney-Vento 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



Title I and Homelessness— Key Provisions

- A child or youth who is homeless and is attending any school in the district is automatically eligible for Title IA services
- LEAs must reserve (or set aside) funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to children in Title IA schools to serve homeless children who do not attend participating schools, including providing educational support services to children in shelters and other locations where homeless children may live



Strategies for Determining the Title I Set-Aside Amount

- Review needs and costs involved in serving homeless students in the current year and project for the following year
- Multiply the number of homeless students by the Title IA per pupil allocation
- For districts with subgrants, reserve an amount greater than or equal to the McKinney-Vento subgrant funding request
- Reserve a percentage based on the district's poverty level or total Title IA allocation



Title I—Services for Homeless Students

- Services for homeless students in both Title I and non-Title I schools comparable to those provided to non-homeless students in Title I schools
- Services that are not ordinarily provided to other Title I students and that are not available from other sources



What We're All About

“...Through it all, school is probably the only thing that has kept me going. I know that every day that I walk in those doors, I can stop thinking about my problems for the next six hours and concentrate on what is most important to me. Without the support of my school system, I would not be as well off as I am today. School keeps me motivated to move on, and encourages me to find a better life for myself.”

Carrie Arnold, LeTendre Scholar, 2002

