

Lower Merion School District

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Policy No.: 262
Section: STUDENTS
Title: STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOUSELESSNESS AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTABILITY
Date Adopted: 11/20/17
Date Revised: 2/18/25; 10/21/24

R262 STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOUSELESSNESS AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTABILITY

Guidelines for Homeless Students Experiencing Houselessness

The Home and School Visitor/School Social Worker is the Board’s designee to serve as the District's liaison for students experiencing houselessness¹ and their families. They shall, in carrying out their responsibilities, be responsible for coordinating with the following entities on an as-needed basis:

1. Local service agencies that provide services to children and youth experiencing houselessness and their families;
2. Other school districts on issues of records transfer and transportation; and
3. State and local housing agencies responsible for comprehensive housing affordability strategies.

Consistent with the Basic Education Circular on Education for Homeless Youth, the Home and School Visitor/School Social Worker’s responsibilities include the following:

1. Identify students experiencing houselessness with assistance of school personnel and other agencies.
2. Inform parents/guardians of educational rights and related opportunities available to their children experiencing houselessness and provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.
3. Disseminate public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing houselessness where such children receive services under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (such as schools, family shelters and food pantries).
4. Mediate enrollment disputes.
5. Inform the parent/guardian of a child, youth and any unaccompanied youth experiencing houselessness, of all transportation options, including to the school of origin, and assist in accessing these transportation services.

¹ Similarly to the accompanying Policy, “Houseless” is used in this Regulation as a more person-centered term than the “homeless” but is interchangeable with the term “homeless” from a legal standpoint as that term is used in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

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6. Ensure that unaccompanied youth are immediately enrolled in school pending enrollment or placement disputes.
7. Assist children and youths experiencing houselessness who do not have documentation of immunizations or medical records to obtain necessary immunizations or necessary medical documentation.
8. Understand the guidance issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) for the education of students experiencing houselessness and be ready to explain this guidance to District staff.
9. Get to know resources in the community to assist families experiencing houselessness with referrals for things such as shelter, counseling, food and transportation.
10. Distribute information on the subject of s students experiencing houselessness and arrange staff development workshops and presentations for school personnel, including office staff.
11. Provide standard forms and information about enrollment procedures and key school programs to each shelter in the District.
12. Become familiar with the various program materials that are available from PDE.
13. Ensure that public notice of the educational rights of students experiencing houselessness is disseminated in locations frequented by parents and guardians of such children and youths, and unaccompanied youths, including schools, shelters, public libraries, and soup kitchens, in a manner and form understandable to the parents and guardians and unaccompanied youth.
14. Collaborate with the District's special education program to ensure that children experiencing houselessness who are in need of special education and related services are located, identified and evaluated. This is a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which mandates that children experiencing houselessness be identified and served. Liaisons should also ensure that homeless youths who have or may have disabilities have a parent or a surrogate parent to make special education or early intervention decisions. In the case of unaccompanied homeless youth, if a student is disabled or may be disabled and the youth does not have a person authorized to make special education decisions, the following people can be temporary surrogate parents: staff in emergency shelters; transitional shelters; independent living programs; street outreach programs; and state, local educational agency or child welfare agency staff

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involved in the education or care of the child. This rule applies only to unaccompanied homeless youth;

15. Identify preschool-aged children experiencing houselessness by working closely with shelters and social service agencies in the area.
16. Identify unaccompanied youth experiencing houselessness while respecting their privacy and dignity by providing specific outreach to areas where eligible students who are out of school may congregate.
17. Ensure that unaccompanied youths are enrolled in school, and have opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic standards as the state establishes for other children and youths, are informed of their status as independent students under section 480 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) (20 U.S.C 1087vv), and their right to receive verification of this status from the local liaison.

Enrollment/Placement

To the extent feasible, and in accordance with the student's best interest, a student experiencing houselessness shall continue to be enrolled in their school of origin while they are experiencing houselessness or until the end of the academic year in which they obtain permanent housing. Parents/Guardians of a student experiencing houselessness may request enrollment in the school in the attendance area where the student is actually living or other schools. If a student is unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, the District liaison will consider the views of the student in determining where s/he will be enrolled.

In determining the best interest of the child or youth experiencing houselessness, the District shall:

- a) to the extent feasible, keep a child or youth experiencing houselessness in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the parent or guardian of a child experiencing houselessness;
- b) provide a written explanation, including a statement regarding the right to appeal, to the parent or guardian of a child experiencing houselessness, if the District sends such child or youth to a school other than the school of origin or a school requested by the parent or guardian; and
- c) in the case of an unaccompanied youth experiencing houselessness, ensure

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that the designated liaison assists in placement or enrollment decisions under this subparagraph, considers the views of such unaccompanied youth experiencing houselessness and provides notice to such youth of the right to appeal.

The selected school shall immediately enroll the student and begin instruction, even if the student is unable to produce records normally required for enrollment pursuant to Board Policy. However, the District may require a parent/guardian to submit contact information. The District liaison may contact the previous school for oral confirmation of immunizations, with written confirmation to follow within thirty (30) days, and shall request records from the previous District.

If the District is unable to determine the student's grade level due to missing or incomplete records, the District shall administer tests or utilize appropriate means to determine the student's placement.

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall be immediately enrolled in the school in which enrollment is sought, pending resolution of the dispute, which shall take place in accordance with the procedures developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The parents/guardians shall be provided with a written explanation of the District's decision, their right to appeal and the procedures to use for the appeal.

Services

Students experiencing houselessness shall be provided services comparable to those offered to other District students including, but not limited to, transportation services; school nutrition programs; vocational programs and technical education; preschool programs; programs for students with limited English proficiency; and educational services for which students meet eligibility criteria, such as programs for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and gifted and talented students.

Transportation

The District shall provide transportation for students experiencing houselessness to their school of origin or the school they choose to attend within the District.

If the school of origin is outside of the District's boundaries, or if the student experiencing houselessness lives in another District but will attend their school of origin in the District, the school districts shall agree upon a method to apportion the responsibility and costs of the transportation. If the school districts cannot agree upon such a method, the responsibility and costs shall be shared equally.

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Dispute Resolution Process

- **Level 1** – A dispute may be raised with the District
 1. If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the child or youth experiencing houselessness involved must immediately be admitted to the school in which they are seeking enrollment, pending resolution of the dispute.
 2. The parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth who initiates the dispute should contact the District liaison for individuals experiencing houselessness as soon as possible after receiving notice of the dispute. If the person initiating the dispute does not contact the District liaison directly, the District shall be responsible for contacting the District liaison regarding the dispute as soon as possible and referring the family or youth involved to the liaison.
 3. The District liaison shall ensure that the child or youth experiencing houselessness is immediately enrolled, explain the dispute resolution process to families and help them to use it.
 4. The District shall issue a written disposition of the dispute within 20 business days after the District liaison is notified of the dispute. The disposition shall be provided to the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth and shall explain the basis for the decision and advise the parent, guardian or youth of the right to appeal.
 5. The District should use and maintain copies of PDE’s “Notice of Procedural Safeguards” (<http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Codes%20and%20Regulations/Basic%20Education%20Circulars/US%20Code/Procedural%20Safeguards%20Notice%20of%20Denial%20of%20Enrollment.pdf>) which ensures that all Districts (a) inform families of the basis of their decision regarding enrollment or school selection; (b) notifies families of their right to remain in their school of choice pending resolution of the dispute and (c) explains the procedures for challenging the decision of the District.
- **Level 2** – A complaint may be filed with a McKinney-Vento Coordinator
 1. If the parent, guardian or unaccompanied youth is dissatisfied with the District’s disposition of a dispute or would like to raise any issue of McKinney-Vento Act noncompliance, they may file a complaint or appeal with a McKinney-Vento site or regional coordinator, with the state coordinator, or appeal the decision to a court of competent jurisdiction.

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Funding/Title I

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (reauthorized December 2015 by the Every Student Succeeds Act) mandates that funds be reserved to serve children experiencing houselessness.

The District shall reserve such funds as are necessary to provide services comparable to those provided to children in schools funded under Title I to serve children experiencing houselessness who do not attend participating schools, including providing educationally related support services to children in shelters and other locations where children may live.

Guidelines for Other Students Experiencing Educational Instability

The District shall designate a point of contact for students experiencing educational instability. This may be the same liaison as the liaison for students experiencing houselessness. No student shall be discriminated against, segregated or stigmatized based on their status as a student experiencing educational instability.

The District shall ensure that students experiencing educational instability have fair and equal access to the same educational programs, activities and services provided to other District students.

The Superintendent shall waive specific requirements in Board policies, procedures and administrative regulations to the extent that they create barriers for the enrollment and attendance of students experiencing educational instability. Such waivers include, but are not limited to, requirements regarding:

1. Dress code.
2. Transportation.
3. School-sponsored or extracurricular activities for which students meet placement and qualification requirements, including, but not limited to, clubs, athletics, performing arts, class trips, social events, career and technical education, internships and specialized classes.
4. Fees related to school-sponsored or extracurricular activity participation fees, and other fees including, but not limited to, school identification (badges, cards, etc.), uniforms, materials, lost or damaged items, athletic physical exams, parking or driving, food services, library, locker or padlock rental or replacement, summer school or credit recovery, technology and graduation regalia.

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- 5. Graduation.
- 6. Registration deadlines.